



Faculty of Arts  
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**REPRESENTING “COMMODITY” IN SHAKESPEARE’S  
THEATRE**

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## ABSTRACT

FALSTAFF     I bought him in Paul's, and he'll buy me a horse in Smithfield. An I could get me but a wife in the stews, I were manned, horsed, and wived (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.44-46).

Over the period Shakespeare was writing there was a fundamental evolution in the meaning of “commodity” from something beneficial or serving one’s interest to something to be sold for personal profit (Howard Personal communication). As Falstaff suggests here, one important aspect of Shakespeare’s theatre is its ability to show how the new notion of “commodity” could also mean trading men and women. Commodity can, therefore, already be associated with “commodification” (OED 1974). Moreover, the process can be recognised across the social scale. The social values of early modern society as mirrored in Shakespeare’s theatre, rather than being an individual matter, are thus shown to be part of a collective process. As studies have shown, the most obvious early modern human commodity was the prostitute and, through association with the Southwark district of London, where Shakespeare’s works were being performed, so were the “hired men”, or players. Yet, Shakespeare’s theatre accords a degree of agency (the ability to make choices and act on those choices) to both, especially women, who were considered as belonging to men (either their fathers or husbands) or as prostitutes, but who are nonetheless given some space for manoeuvre by the playwright. The same cannot always be said for male characters when they come into contact with commodity. In Shakespeare’s plays, where commodity is often at the core of power relations, male authority is shown to be frail and corrupt; it becomes deviant and often makes male characters subservient to unjust laws or demonstrate dishonourable behaviour. In this thesis I show that once authority has been decentred by commodity for profit, it can be further destabilised across society. Shakespeare’s male characters are thus shown to be as objectified as their female counterparts. The phenomenon was already a familiar one within the army, since soldiers had for centuries been mere cannon fodder. It is significant that commodification also affects other male characters, who seem, at best, submissive dupes to commodity (they are either their own victims of commodity desire or gulls to commodity scams) or, at worst, commodified themselves. Even the soldier-king is not exempt from a substantial loss of agency in Shakespeare’s representation of England’s feudalistic culture being replaced by mercantilism (Drakakis Personal communication). I approach the representation of commodity empirically and from a variety of theoretical perspectives: essentially Gender Studies, New Economic Criticism and Close Reading. I demonstrate that “commodity” was a textual and physical source of structural alteration that was itself undergoing important changes. I show that Shakespeare’s was a theatre

of commodities regardless of status and rank. Moreover, Shakespeare approaches commodity from a variety of perspectives, ranging from the comic and light-hearted, to the serious, derisive, and tragic. Most importantly, as commodity becomes increasingly perceptible on stage, some characters lose sight of themselves while others better manage to adjust to the increasing predisposition for commodities.

I have divided the thesis into nine chapters. After the Introduction and the Historical Background, Chapter Three examines the tensions, interactions and dramatic exchanges represented by the passage from an older generation's sense of commodity to its new generation significations. In Chapter Four, I examine Shakespeare's theatre through the lens of prostitutes and players that anticipates today's consumption of culture as commodity but also recognises the person behind the function or reveals brothel clients to maintain agency only by prostituting themselves. Chapter Five demonstrates how Shakespeare allows female characters to resist the notion of woman as commodity in marriage through the way he positions them onstage. Moreover, positioning female bodies in different stage spaces also reveals changing perspectives on objectification, since male characters are represented as objectified in the spaces they were supposed to control. In Chapter Six, I demonstrate how men are further misused and manipulated by commodity, and by other characters, on both the private and public level. Here, it can even be said that commodity logic, or its monetary equivalent, has completely distorted human relations. Chapter Seven analyses how the soldier, who should be the physical embodiment of the nation's authoritative force, is similarly corrupted and contaminated due to his monetary value, though at times he appears to resist the process. Finally, Chapter Eight reveals Shakespeare's ability to represent objectified kings; through the theatrical commodity of the crown, Shakespeare performs the objectification of monarchy. Though kings or queens could still parade their might, like the actors playing them on stage, the regal symbol and its supposed strength had become little more than a vulgar commodity. To sum up, I show how changing notions of commodity cause chaos as unscrupulous mercantilism replaces neighbourliness in early modern England. In Shakespeare, some characters, traditionally held to be simple objects, were at times able to resist commodification or take advantage of opportunities to achieve desired outcomes. On the other hand, the characters who were supposed to command agency can often be seen to lack the ability to act for themselves. In short, I explore three essential questions: What does Shakespeare's representation of commodity show us about early modern society? How does Shakespeare's representation of commodity relate to wider significations of value? Why should we consider the issue on a societal rather than an individual level?

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After a BA Honours in French and Economics from University College of North Wales (Bangor University) and fifteen years selling financial commodities in the French banking and insurance sector in Paris and the Provinces, I turned to teaching to avoid becoming something of an embodied commodity myself. I then passed the *CAPES* and *Agrégation*, where I re-discovered the clear-sighted beauty of Shakespeare. After, I took a Master of Arts Degree in English at the *Université de Poitiers*, where I dealt with notions of authority in *The Winter's Tale* before branching out to the University of Helsinki to research into what authority “commodity” had in Shakespeare’s other works. I am thankful to all three academic institutions for allowing me the chance to do so. I am much obliged to the University of Helsinki for its support and for providing me with the opportunity for study in Finland.

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## SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS CITED

Dates of creation/first performances are from the RSC website: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespearesplays/timeline>. All quotes are from *The Norton Shakespeare* with specific quotations noted parenthetically.

- *The Taming of the Shrew* 1592
- *Henry VI Part II* 1591
- *Henry VI Part III* 1595
- *Henry VI Part I* 1592
- *Richard III* 1592 or 1594
- *The Comedy of Errors* 1594
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1595-96
- *Romeo and Juliet* 1595-96
- *Richard II* 1595-96
- *King John* 1595-97
- *The Merchant of Venice* 1598
- *Henry IV Part I* 1596-97
- *Henry IV Part II* 1597-98
- *Much Ado About Nothing* 1598
- *Henry V* 1599
- *Hamlet* 1600
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1597-1601
- *Troilus and Cressida* 1601-02
- *Othello* 1604
- *Measure for Measure* 1604
- *All's Well That Ends Well* 1603-06
- *Timon of Athens* 1604-06
- *King Lear* 1605-06
- *Macbeth* 1606
- *Pericles* 1608
- *The Winter's Tale* 1611

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Amussen “Gender”: Amussen, Susan Dwyer. “Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560-1725”.

Amussen “Ordered Society”: Amussen, Susan Dwyer. *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*.

Bacon “Essays”: Hawkins, J., ed. *Bacon’s Essays*.

Bacon “Works”: Spedding, James, ed. *The Works of Francis Bacon Vol. 3*.

Bailey “Forms of Payback”: Bailey, Amanda. “*Timon of Athens*, Forms of Payback, and the Genre of Debt.”

Bailey “Of Bondage”: Bailey, Amanda. *Of Bondage: Debt, Property, and Personhood in Early Modern England*.

Bailey “Christian Thought”: Bailey, Derrick Sherwin. *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought*.

Foucault “Courage”: Foucault, Michel. “The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II - First Lecture”.

Foucault “Meaning”: Foucault, Michel, “The Meaning and Evolution of the Word *Parrhesia*”.

Foucault “Spaces”: Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”.

Gurr “Playgoing”: Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*.

Gurr “Shakespearean Stage”: Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*.

Gurr and Ichikawa “Shakespeare’s Theatres”: Gurr, Andrew and Mariko Ichikawa. *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres*.

Hawkes “Idols”: Hawkes, David. *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature*.

Hawkes “Theory”: Hawkes, David. *Shakespeare and Economic Theory*.

Hawkes “Usury”: Hawkes, David. *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England*.

Hillman “Problem Plays”: Hillman, Richard. *William Shakespeare: The Problem Plays*.

Hillman “Transgression”: Hillman, Richard. “Criminalizing the Woman’s Incest: Pericles and its Analogues”.

Howard “Crossdressing”: Howard, Jean E. “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England”.

Howard “Masculinity”: Howard, Jean E. “Civic Institutions and Precarious Masculinity in Dekker’s *The Honest Whore*”.

Howard “Stage”: Howard, Jean E. *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*.

James I “Kings are justly called Gods”: MacArthur Brian, ed. *The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches*.

McNally “Global Slump”: McNally, David. *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*.

McNally “Political Economy”: McNally, David. *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism*.

Newman “Fashioning”: Newman, Karen. *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*.

Newman “Ring”: Newman, Karen. “Portia’s Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*”.

Partridge “Bawdy”: Partridge, Eric. *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*.

Partridge “Underworld”: *A Dictionary of the Underworld: British and American*.

Sharpe “Disruption”: Sharpe, J. A. “Disruption in the Well-Ordered Household: Age, Authority and Possessed Young People”.

Smith “Women”: Smith, Emma. *Women on the Early Modern Stage*.

Smith “Old Blue Laws”: Smith, Preserved. “Some Old Blue-Laws”.

Smith “Anglorum”: Smith, Thomas. *De Republica Anglorum*.

Smith “Commonwealth”: Smith, Thomas. *The Common Wealth of England, and the Manner and Government thereof*.

Stow “Chronicles”: Stow, John. *The Chronicles of England from Brute unto this present yeare of Christ*.

Stow “London”: Stow, John. *A suruay of London Contayning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that citie*.

Tillyard “History Plays”: Tillyard, E. M. W. *Shakespeare’s History Plays*.

Tillyard “Problem Plays”: Tillyard, E. M. W. *Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*.

Turner “Renaissance Stage”: Turner, Henry S. *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580-1630*.

Turner “Ritual”: Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*.



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- **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 General introduction**

This thesis is about the ways commodity was represented in Shakespeare's theatre. Douglas Bruster notes that "commodity", "once connoting something like 'convenience', a meaning now obsolete, came to refer instead to concrete things, exchangeable goods and wares like food and drink, cloth, paper and string" (41). The issues at stake are, therefore, whether the commodity in Shakespeare's theatre corresponds to either, or both, of these meanings and what Shakespeare's representations of commodity can tell us about early modern society. To address these key questions, I look at all the occurrences of "commodity" in Shakespeare's plays within the framework of the early modern context. What we see at once is that commodity was increasingly a resource with which to generate income. In other words, commodity, when it was traded in a market, could generate capital that could be turned into something new and profitable should the occasion arise; and, this was different from medieval forms of local industry that supplied on more or less regular demand. Marx notes how:

The circulation of commodities is the starting-point of capital. Commodity production and that highly developed form of commodity circulation which is known as commerce constitute the historical groundwork upon which it rises. The modern history of capital begins in the sixteenth century with the establishment of a world-wide commercial system and the opening of a world market (132).

Early modern capital wealth was thus generated by the time individuals spent working to produce all forms of commodities that were exchanged, thanks to and through money, in a widening marketplace. The generation of income from time spent at work was a signal of the change from feudalism to mercantilism (1500-1750); and, by the second half of the sixteenth century, an international money market had been established. As R. H. Tawney points out, the new financial organisation meant internationalism and freedom for every capitalist to undertake any transaction within his means in markets that were by then in sympathy with each other. On the other hand, Tawney remarks upon the chaos of an increasingly acquisitive society resulting from capitalist expansion, without any efficient control, and the imbalance of feudal methods and mercantilism, with its trade crises, monetary confusion and currency disorder:

The State wavered uneasily between these two extremes. Tradition, a natural conservatism, a belief in its own mission as the guardian of 'good order' in economic

matters, gave it an initial bias to the first; the pressure of a city interest growing in wealth and political influence, its own clamorous financial necessities, the mere logic of economic development, pushed strongly towards the second. Hence, its treatment of financial capitalism was vacillating and inconsistent (62).

Mercantilism meant private accumulation of wealth and an organisation where finance came to dominate the system and was called upon to govern society. Feudal serfdom had already created a status-structured society but when the system was replaced by wage-labour, with wages based on the time spent in commodity production, the individuals involved in the labour process could themselves become “commodified”. This is because individuals were selling their work-time like a commodity on a piecemeal basis. The accumulation of capital resulting from this process allowed for mercantilism, which would itself foster the capitalism (OED 1833) that emerged during the Industrial Revolution (1750-1840), since a sufficient concentration of wealth allowed for enterprise, or productive investment. As such, the capitalism on an industrial level that was theorised by Karl Marx in the first volume of *Capital* was staged in Shakespeare’s theatre as exploitation of man by man.

In fact, Shakespeare was writing in a society striving to shape a new societal agenda. In an alternative to the king maintaining codes of moral conduct and granting privileges to his subjects the country was moving towards a policy based more on mercantilism. Thus, in line with Thomas Smith’s remarks in *The Common Wealth of England, and the Manner and Government Thereof* (1589), the king’s role was to be that of a “cunning man” (17); fittingly, since the word “king” itself meant at once “know”, “understand” and “be able” or “have power”. Even the monarch, like a modern-day capitalist, had to increasingly contend for his position, monopolise, contain or circumvent competition, and control relationships. By the time of the Renaissance, evidence of social exploitation was increasingly visible: in the large number of beggars, who could no longer be cared for after the 1535-1540 Dissolution of the Monasteries in the wake of Henry VIII’s break from Rome (Randall 63) and, after which, Henry VIII redistributed much of the great monastic estates that were, in turn, sub-letted for personal profit; in the move to less labour-intensive farming methods, such as sheep rearing (woollen manufacture was to become England’s staple industry) instead of corn growing, that led to the depopulation of the countryside (Lipson 410, 421-422); in the enclosure system, which deprived commoners of their rights to enjoy the use of common land and meant eviction, rural depopulation through total derivation of the means of earning a living and unemployment. Evidence of economic exploitation that created beggars also reveals how individualistic profit-

seeking landowners, who were selfishly causing these changes through enclosure, could generate capital from the resources that were once available to everyone.

Post-Reformation Calvinists, however, believed human happiness could be gained through materialism such as the commercialisation of land for profit instead of its being a means of subsistence. John Calvin (1509-1564) expanded upon the ideas of Martin Luther (1483-1546), who had suggested that work was no longer a calling but a blessing for those who could not commit themselves to a religious vocation. Thus, what we now know as the “Protestant work ethic” could be enlarged from the religious to the secular sphere of life, since work, whatever the occupation, could be seen as a service to God. Calvin’s ideas were essentially pragmatic: he was working in the isolated geographical context of Switzerland, which was struggling to support itself financially in which ever way possible, whereas Luther wrote in the larger agrarian community of Wittenburg, which was supported by the Holy Roman Empire.

In Switzerland, to survive, serve God and raise standards of living for some, Calvin’s ideology of Christian commitment to work and self-denial also included lending money to a friend in need for a “price”, that is, at interest, despite Christendom condemning this practice known as usury (premium or interest on money given or received on loan) as it violated Jesus’ command to Luke to “do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return” (Luke 6:35). Calvin believed usury was tolerable, as long as money-lending did not become a “full-time job” (Eaton 5). He hence considered permissible a maximum rate of three percent for personal loans (the number three represented the gifts of God to the people and a merciful man’s gift to others) and five percent for business loans (in the Middle Ages charging a rate of over five percent would lead to a legally authorised public beheading) (Count of Bethlen 358). In the long-term, however, Calvin did more than reinterpret the canons for the benefit of Genevan citizens: by liberating Christians from the Biblical ban upon taking interest on loans he brought upon the world a spirit of what we now know as capitalism: commercial undertakings based on credit and the possession of capital or wealth in a free market with the dominance of private ownership for profit.

W. J. Bouwsma (1988) argues that Calvin also saw private property as essential to social well-being, since property rights meant that goods and resources would be used efficiently. In early modern England, however, property came to mean allowing individuals to increasingly confiscate whatever property they wished and thus led to an abandonment of social order. Enclosure, for example, traditionally held to symbolise the move from medieval ideas of *dominium directum* (a lord’s legal ownership of land) and *dominium utilis* (the tenant’s right to enjoy land), became emblematic of this individual quest for “property”; this was a word whose

meaning had itself shifted from what are now obsolete ideas of the “characteristic quality of a person or thing; (hence) character, nature” (OED “property” 1 a.) to a “(usually material) thing belonging to a person, group of persons, etc.; a possession” (OED “property” 3 b.). Norman Jones notes how:

[Enclosure] was assumed to dispossess farmers, create vagrants, drive up the price of food, and damage the commonwealth. But by the 1580s this assumption was being questioned. Enclosure, after all, was a form of economic improvement, and improvement was emerging as a desirable end (160).

Jones goes on to remark how, in 1593, Parliament repealed the anti-enclosure statutes and how the new idea that self-interest was a better regulator than prohibitions of sinful behaviour was taking hold. By 1620, the legislation was, like the 1571 law against usury, hence abandoned by Parliament (Jones 160).

However, a large amount of the money borrowed in early modern England was not destined to improve living conditions but was for subsistence. Early modern usurers, who lent money at unreasonably high rates of interest and kept their needy debtors (peasants living from day to day, apprentices wanting to set up their own business or penniless masters) in perpetual obligation, could thence make other human beings into slaves to money: what we now call commodification. The two concepts (usury/commodification) became legally and morally equivalent (Hawkes “Theory” 22, 158), and were even enforced by royal proclamation, as Benjamin S. Horack notes:

In 1545, in response to these needs of expanding business and commerce, Henry VIII authorized the taking of lawful interest by an act providing for a 10% maximum [37 Henry VIII, c. 9.] because, in the words of the statute, “where divers actes have bene made for the avoiding and punishment of usury, being a thing unlawful, and other corrupt bargaines, shifts, and chevisances, which be so obscure in terms, and so many questions ye growen up ye same, and of so litle effect, that litle punishment, but rather incouragement to offenders that ensued thereby”. However, this law was repealed ten years later by a statute [5 & 6 Edw. VI, c. 20 (1555)] which prohibited the taking of any interest whatsoever on pain of forfeiting the entire debt. But the need for the extension of the credit system and the employment of capital remained, so in 1570 the repealed statute of Henry VIII was re-enacted [13 Eliz., c. 18] (37).

Usury and private ownership as part of an efficiently-functioning market economy came to mean that self-interested individuals used property to maximise their personal profit without any consideration for the collective well-being. Shakespeare's theatre examines the question of whether "economic" progress could mean social progress; that is, whether the nascent shift from the now obsolete sense of the art or science of household management and the proper organisation of domestic resources (OED 1393) to contemporary connotations of the commercially advantageous or expedient (OED 1899) signifies an improvement in social welfare. Shakespeare particularly develops this analysis through the representation of the commodity, to which I now turn attention in my research questions.

## **1.2 Research questions**

Scholars have recently been interested in Shakespearean theatre as a showcase for the question of commodity, especially concerning the loss of agency. Research has been conducted on the subject in relation to women (Juliet Dusinberre 1975, Karen Newman 1991, Linda Kay Stanton 2014) or the underprivileged (Alan Sinfield 1992, Jean E. Howard 1994), but there has not yet been a sustained analysis of how Shakespearean theatre demonstrates the collective experience of an evolving perception of commodity. Critics such as Sandra K. Fischer (1989) and Jesse M. Lander (2002) argue that Shakespeare's theatre shows how society was unable to provide an alternative value system to commodity. This study, then, explores whether the ubiquity of commodity can be explained by this lack of an alternative, and to discover how Shakespeare exposes both the opportunities and the threats of the transition from feudalism to an expanding market mentality in his representation of commodity on stage.

The parameters of my research have been defined as "Shakespeare", "commodity" and "theatre" because, as Shakespeare's plays cover such a wide range of early modern societal issues, they offer a useful point of reference with which to examine the phenomenon. The focus on his theatre is practical, allowing me to limit the scope of the research to a manageable context. I show that commodity is an important theme in Shakespeare's plays; he examines the effects on human relations of issues such as debt, credit, profit, contracts, and expanding domestic and overseas markets. This is why "theatre" is the final parameter for the research project because, with the advent of commercial theatre in the late sixteenth century (itself a commerce that had to negotiate the evolving economic realities of the period), it provides a space that inevitably converses with the social and business reality of the time and reflects the growing business-related essence of the period.



David Hawkes, for instance, sees self-interest and the violation of the natural teleology (purpose) of objects and humans to be an axiomatic feature of early modern England. People were aware of the confusion of means and ends but simply replaced notions of authentic nature with “human custom” that accorded a “second nature” to commodities and displaced the first. After the Reformation, Protestants criticised the replacement of nature by custom as Catholic “idolatry”: an unhealthy carnal obsession with the things of the world and the pleasures of the flesh. Under the growing influence of a market economy, exchange for profit, or making money from money, was also seen as idolatrous, since it encouraged “a ‘fleshy’ approach to life and a ‘carnal’ view of the world” (Hawkes “Idols” 5-6). Yet, idolatry made it possible for early modern culture to make sense of notions such as mercantilism, commodity, and usury; moreover, it did so through the commodity-equivalent of money: “No man can be ignorant of the idolatry that is generally committed in these degenerate times to money, as if it could do all things public and private” said Bacon (“Works” 415). Whereas everyone seemed to know their place in society during the Middle Ages, the mercantilist expansion hence meant a social confusion, with James I even resorting to selling knighthoods; as Thomas Smith puts it, “as for gentlemen, they be made good cheap in England” (“Anglorum” 39). As Thomas Dekker’s character Clare remarks:

CLARE    Fabian Scarecrow used to frequent me and my husband divers times. And at last comes he out one morning to my husband, and says, master Tenterhook, says he, I must trouble you to lend me 200 pound about a commodity which I am to deal in, and what was that commodity but his knighthood (*Westward Ho* 5.2.342).

The infatuation with mercantilism meant that even intangible values such as honour were decreasingly codified according to feudal hierarchy (associated with certain duties and responsibility) and increasingly traded for personal profit in a break from old traditions, and where honour could be acquired commercially in a mere change of ownership. Jean-Christophe Agnew describes the process as one where what we would now call “the simplified cash nexus [OED 1839] of commerce had begun to supplant the complex human nexus of society” (2). As I shall show in this thesis, former symbols, if still paraded, would thus become mere hollow performances of the old-order regime. Ideals of national unity, even when the state attempted to keep them alive through the creation of myths designed to arouse sentiments of devotedness, could be neglected and the legitimacy of any one stable authority undermined. Shakespeare’s

narratives are pertinent because they send out messages and metaphors to spectators themselves experiencing these changes. Agnew explains the capacity theatre had to encapsulate the development:

What conventions, after all, could convey the experience of conventionality, the sensed hollowness of ritual the liquidity and the impersonality of the money form conferred on the customary forms of exchange? What rhetorical devices or forms of address could accommodate the new and unsettling confusion over personal distance and intimacy that perplexed those brought together in commodity transactions? What image of the individual could take adequate measure of a self no longer, or at least not fully, authorized within the traditional religious, familial, or class frame? And if such conventions, devices, and imagery were indeed available, where might they develop freely enough to coalesce into an intelligible, formal analogue of the increasingly fugitive and abstract social relations of a burgeoning market society? Where else, we might ask, but the theatre (11)?

Further, as cash was an easily recognisable symbol of early modern society (actual gold, silver, and copper coins were used to make purchases, while figurative moneys-of-account served as systems to record monetary payments, express monetary values and relate values of goods), it enabled Shakespeare to fully represent the mercantilism of early modern society. Barrie Cook, the Curator of Medieval and Early Modern Coinage at the British Museum, notes, for instance, how money is indeed used in Shakespeare to “give crucial information on status and character, as plot devices and to add local colour, but also as a means of engaging with profound issues” (8).

Theodore Leinwand further suggests that symbols such as “market”, “marketplace”, “exchange”, “commodity” and “circulation” also served Shakespeare “as tacit markers of structures and practices that we acknowledge but that we can neither feel nor locate with much precision” (5). Following Marx, Leinwand suggests Shakespeare represents early modern moral and social existence under an appearance of mutual trust through ideas of money as representation, credit and banking, and yet what he is really showing spectators is distrust and total estrangement with man staged as the incarnation of capital and interest. He argues, “such an emphasis on trust is a tacit acknowledgement of the possibility of distrust” with societal compromises only resulting from “ethically charged adjustments made in the face of socio-economic disorientation” (Leinwand 23, 42). Shakespeare thus figures the transition from social

trust to distrust through tropes of gifts, commodities and their monetary representation to trace the emergence of a mercantilist sphere in place of a social one.

Douglas Bruster sees London's playhouses themselves as "practical examples of the market", where "like the citizen merchant and his wife, actors apparelled themselves for the business of selling commodities". For Bruster, theatre thus provides a useful context for studying processes of objectification, since playwrights were writing dramatic commodities in exchange for money that were bought by spectators and playgoers of all degrees who, at least for the length of a performance, could buy a fantasy of their choosing (25, 6). Money motivated theatre-building constructors, members of the acting companies, theatre shareholders and even the watermen whose livelihoods depended on ferrying audiences across the Thames, which points to another clear link between commodity exchange in early modern society and in the theatre. Shakespeare's treatment of commodity across the canon, if not to be seen as a strictly accurate mirror of early modern society, can, therefore, be regarded as a valuable historical record of how real people directly concerned with the process experienced it. Moreover, Shakespeare's characters represent aspects of commodity across the social scale. We can say that Shakespeare's theatre was a space that fabricated commodity, and commodity was emblematic of Shakespeare's vision of early modern society. To demonstrate this point, after having outlined my research questions, I provide a series of etymological definitions to justify them. Then, an overview of chapters indicates how I map out my thesis and highlights the most important points that will hopefully stimulate new ways of thinking about "commodity" in Shakespeare's plays.

I seek to address the following questions: What does Shakespeare's representation of commodity show us about early modern society? What behaviours do Shakespeare's characters display in relation to the phenomenon? What difficulties do characters experience when they are commodified themselves? How does Shakespeare's representation of commodity relate to wider significations of value? Why should we consider the issue on a societal rather than an individual level? To start to answer these questions, I will examine the term's evolving signification over the period.

### **1.3 Defining commodity**

Income, revenue. A thing which is beneficial to or advantageous for a person; a benefit; a convenience. Advantage, benefit; interest. Also: private or selfish interest; self-interest. Comfort or ease afforded to a person, the body, etc.; convenience. Material gain; profit. Expediency. A thing produced for use or sale; a piece of merchandise; an

article of commerce. A quantity or lot of goods sold on credit by a moneylender. a consignment; a batch; a lot (OED “commodity”).

The manifestations of “commodity” in Shakespeare’s theatre include all of the above concepts. This section examines the semantic evolution of the term through medieval and Renaissance England. First, we need to make a distinction between medieval and early modern senses of the term. *The Oxford English Dictionary* writes that the word was: “Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from French [*commodité*]. Partly a borrowing from Latin [*commoditās*]” (OED “commodity”). The etymology of commodity is important since it allows us to trace its semantic shift back to early modern England. A commodity came to mean an object that derives its value by virtue of exchange but notions of commodity are supplemented from multiple sources. As the OED notes:

The French *commodité* product (especially one from which profit can be made), piece of merchandise (late 13th cent. or earlier in Anglo-Norman, early 15th cent. in continental French), in Anglo-Norman also amenity, profit (early 14th cent. or earlier), and its etymon (ii) classical Latin *commoditāt-*, *commoditās* opportuneness, timeliness, aptness, suitability, advantage, convenience, utility, complaisance, obligingness, in post-classical Latin also (in legal context) asset, easement (frequently from 12th cent. in British sources), useful product (from early 15th cent. in British sources) (OED “commodity” etymology).

Sir William Fraser (1816-1898), the Scottish genealogist and archivist, is credited with the first entry for “commodity” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. From a quote dated 1396, in his *Memorials Family Wemyss* (1888), he cites “commoditeis, fredomys and esementys” figuratively to signify advantages and benefits (OED “commodity” n. 1). By 1513, in Henry Bradshaw’s *Here begynneth the holy lyfe and history of saynt werburge* (1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1521), Fraser’s figurative “commodities” take on the concrete format of merchandise as exchange for “profettes and yssues” that many of us today take to be the norm. As we notice in the above quote, however, the development of the commodity, with its terminologies and classifications, is more complicated, with early modern writers inventing new and evolving meanings for it. Shakespeare’s plays present enduring significances of the term; from the outset they provide symbols for the commodities created, exchanged, and printed throughout early modern

England. The term also underlines the ambiguous oppositions and tensions resulting from its dual borrowings and evolving polysemy.

We know that by the time Shakespeare was writing his plays, the multiple significances of the term had already or were in the process of being defined. Similarly, in society even as early as the 1400s the structuring framework of English feudalism had gone: the crusades had opened up new trade routes; the Black Death (1346-1353) had reduced the population by a third and thus made labour an increasingly valuable product; the Peasants Revolt (1381) was one of a succession of uprisings against feudal oppression and an increasingly centralised government, which, in the wake of the 1215 signing of the *Magna Carta*, had weakened the nobility. Shakespeare calls our attention to the process throughout his theatrical works. The playwright's allusions to the term's developing significations in circulation at the time of writing are a rich resource with which to investigate how commodity was at the heart of interactions in early modern society.

In addition to differentiating between medieval and early modern uses of the term, we need to assess what "commodity" would have meant to Shakespeare's playgoers. As meanings were shifting, commodity could just as easily symbolise a "shipment parcel or job-lot of specified trade goods" (Sokol 57) to be exchanged for money or "advantage" (c. 1330), as in "favourable circumstance". As a clear reference to "pay" appears after 1450 (OED "commodity" n. 1 b.), ideas of "material gain; profit" (OED "commodity" n. 2 c.) jostle with now obsolete and intangible notions of "advantage, benefit; interest" (OED "commodity" n. 2 a.) and "comfort or ease afforded to a person, the body, etc." (OED "commodity" n. 2 b.). These were meanings for the term in circulation when Shakespeare was writing his plays. The concept is, however, defined ever more narrowly from the medieval to the early modern period; in fact, "commodity" came basically to signify "expediency", meaning profitable action or policy (now bad rather than good), which is an obvious starting point for our discussion as this meaning features in Shakespeare's *King John*.

In *King John* Shakespeare comments on the turbulent story of the opportunistic king's reign (1199-1216), when the monarch and only surviving son to Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, King of England and claimant to the Angevin throne, is foiled and debased in his vulgarly selfish and amoral projects. The plans involve John's invading France (2.1) to assert a weaker claim to the throne than his nephew Arthur, marrying John's niece, Blanche, to the French king Philip's son, Louis, in a truce after the siege of Angers, or John's capturing Arthur with intent to assassinate him (3.3). However, holding Arthur prisoner leads to sedition amongst the king's own noblemen (4.2), especially when the boy dies trying to escape (4.3) and Louis

invades England. The Pope, who has excommunicated John due to all the agitation, agrees to intervene only if John will cede his kingdom (5.1), just before the monarch is ultimately fatally poisoned by a monk (5.7.35). In fact, the whole play lacks the ritual and decorum usually associated with medieval royalty and is concerned instead with expedient profit-seeking. In the following passage, “commodity” takes the metaphorical form of a weighted bowl; the metaphor serves, moreover, as a leitmotif for the whole of the thesis as it so precisely encapsulates how early modern society was moving from a balanced situation into chaos. In *King John*, the Bastard Faulconbridge describes commodity as a “generalised perversion or ‘bias’ of the world away from its natural, harmonious condition” (Hawkes “Usury” 93). Commodity is the symbolic bias that is accountable for the deviation, just like the weight traditionally placed in bowls to make them curve on an even surface:

BASTARD      Mad world, mad kings, mad composition! [...]  
                     That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,  
                     That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,  
                     Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids, – [...]  
                     That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity;  
                     Commodity, the bias of the world,  
                     The world who of itself is peisèd well,  
                     Made to run even upon even ground,  
                     Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,  
                     This sway of motion, this commodity,  
                     Makes it take head from all indifferency,  
                     From all direction, purpose, course, intent.  
                     And this same bias, this commodity,  
                     This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,  
                     Clapped on the outward eye of fickle France  
                     Hath drawn him from his own determined aid,  
                     From a resolved and honourable war,  
                     To a most base and vile-concluded peace (*King John* 2.1.562-587).

Audiences could also move easily to the real images of the popular games of bowls played in the area around the playhouses to grasp the sense intended. Moreover, the playwright’s personification of “commodity” as a bias, or a “broker” (a go-between or procurer), shows how

seeking gain can potentially translate everything, including kingship, “into its market value to the exclusion of noneconomic considerations” (Cohen “Norton Shakespeare” 1072) in this complicated political period. As David Hawkes remarks, weight was a monetary metaphor (“Theory” 120); he thus assesses the play as a whole as an account of how the mutable nature of money “makes possible the kind of social mobility and identity confusion that is frequently exhibited on the Renaissance stage” and how Shakespeare “understood that money fetishism was incompatible with the older forms of reverence that it would soon displace” (“Usury” 93). Following this interpretation, the understanding of commodity would have been one excluding social considerations in favour of monetary ones along with how cash could be most profitably employed.

Hawkes analyses the conclusion to Faulconbridge’s speech as a “neat prediction of the displacement of monarchical by financial idolatry thanks to the lines: ‘Since kings break faith upon commodity, / Gain, be my Lord, for I will worship thee’ [2.1.597-598]” (94). Indeed, Shakespeare has Richard I’s untitled bastard speak lines about a deviancy that the aristocracy makes literal in the play. The irony is that the illegitimate Faulconbridge is the figure of the traditional social outcast and yet remains loyal to England (if he nonetheless is promoted to Sir Richard Plantagenet during the action), whilst the king and his nobles’ behaviour is selfish throughout. That Faulconbridge was not a historical reality is less important than the character’s reinforcing function in the fiction. Shakespeare’s public could become aware of societal mutations through characters such as Faulconbridge’s since they epitomised how omnipresent commodity, or its monetary equivalent, had become in early modern society. Above all, Shakespeare approaches commodity from an angle combining text and social interaction to suggest that the stage acknowledges new systems of value and can provide a recognisable contextual framework within which they could be read.

Elsewhere and perhaps even more obviously to Shakespeare’s audiences, “commodity” signified “A thing produced for use or sale; a piece of merchandise; an article of commerce” (OED “commodity” n. 3 b.). Shakespeare’s Antipholus twin in *The Comedy of Errors* is, however, muddled by the articles for sale on the market stalls in Ephesus, since he is himself associated with trade: “silks that he had bought for me, / And therewithal took measure of my body” (4.3.8-9). His confusion points to the transition from intangible senses of commodity to more tangible ones as well as the evolution from how goods might be most usefully employed (use-value) to the profit that can be made from objects and people thanks to money (exchange-value). This is what David Hawkes analyses as a transition from ancient Greek notions of “economics”, including notions of housekeeping, charitable hospitality, social and political



considerations to “chrematistics”, that took such use-value considerations to be exterior to its concerns (“Theory” Preface). Less obviously, what we now see as “economic” considerations correspond to what Aristotle termed “chrematistic” ones. There are thus “two kinds of wealth, the useful and the saleable, which contain two kinds of value” operating throughout the sixteenth century; and, to think in “chrematistic terms is to impose an alien, artificial exchange-value upon a natural, physical use-value” (Hawkes “Theory” 6, 11, 25). Moreover, if use-value is limited by nature, exchange-value is artificial and non-material as it is represented by money; and, as money was increasingly becoming a mere sign to represent commodity (existing in the human mind rather than actual gold or silver) it could thus be reproduced indefinitely. As Hawkes notes, semiotic significance became “non-referential at approximately the same historical moment [...] as financial value” (“Theory” 7, 11, 28). Antipholus thus undergoes a confusing early modern commodity experience in *The Comedy of Errors* and we can clearly perceive the combined ethic, aesthetic, linguistic and monetary meanings of commodity that were operating in early modern society in the play. As the play is a comedy, the denouement is a happy one. In Shakespeare, however, the possibility of unlimited growth for the monetary sign also means it could be emptied of all social meaning. When there is no longer a relation between the sign and its referent, monetary meaning can escape the limitation of social nexus. If early modern society was not as aware of the destructive possibilities of man’s spoliation of nature as we are, Shakespeare nonetheless acknowledges the ubiquity of commodity and represents the commodity question in its entirety.

We could imagine that Shakespeare would employ the easy association between “commodity” and “prostitute” (OED “commodity” n. 3 d). Thomas Dekker, in his collection of cony-catching pamphlets exposing criminals and tricksters, the *Bellman of London* (1608), for instance, includes mention of: “The Whore, who is called the Commodity” (H1). Shakespeare, however, prefers to explore instances where both prostitutes *and* their clients are understood in monetary terms. Men, for example, are swindled by “worthless goods nominally sold on credit by a moneylender as a means of evading usury laws” (OED “commodity” n. 6 a (b)) in *Measure for Measure*. Here, a “commodity of brown paper and old ginger” (4.3.5) refers to “a quantity of worthless goods nominally sold on credit by a moneylender as a means of evading usury laws” (OED “commodity” n. 6 a (b)); Dekker, in his *Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606), refers to such trash:

([A]s fire shovels, brown paper, motley cloak-bags, & c.) [that brings] young novices into a fool’s paradise till they have sealed the mortgage of their lands, and then like



pedlars go they (or some familiar spirir for them, raised by the usurer) up and down to cry *Commodities*, which scarce yield the third part of the sum for which they take them up (39).

Dekker associates the money-lender with the pimp, since both live “by the lechery of money and is a bawd to his own bags, taking a fee that they may engender” (17). Such descriptions clearly reveal the harmful potential of excluding social considerations from trade in a doctrineless and uncontrolled form of profit-seeking individualism that was coming to its own; and, *Measure for Measure*’s characters also come to view everyone in a restricted exchange-value sense in a combination of covetousness and cunning. Commodity, in *Measure for Measure*, thus creates a self-engendering dystopia, where ethical questions are ignored. In *Measure for Measure*, commodity triggers the narrative of a disquieting world, where people are figured by virtue of their monetary representation and Agnew’s cash nexus completely supplants the social one.

Elsewhere in Shakespeare, the cash nexus theme is continued since former use-values, including reputation, are transformed into profitable exchange-value goods (OED “commodity” n. 6 b). In *1 Henry IV*, for instance, the intrinsic use-value, or property of being a person, is considered exchange-value, or the property of someone else, for those who have no possessions (such as the poor men who cannot buy their way out of military conscription). All they can do is sell themselves as wage labourers in military service; in Falstaff’s terms they become, “a commodity of warm slaves” (4.2.16-17); as such, their identities have become assimilated into the identity of the state. Alternatively, exchange-value is employed by Falstaff as use-value when he extorts bribes from the wealthier conscripts and since he has the wit to make use of it, the conscripts thus become the means to his profitable end. Shakespeare’s image of soldiers as commodities plainly reveals images of commodity’s capacity to create social and cash confusion in early modern England.

Performing in the theatre also opens up possibilities for commodity of a gender-indiscriminate sort, thanks to the dramatic text embodied in male actors playing both men and women. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Feste comments on the obvious physical femininity of the cross-dressed Viola (as Cesario): “Now Jove, in his next commodity of hair, send thee a beard!” (3.1.39-40). The comment may, as Keir Elam notes, simply be a derision of Viola/Cesario’s virility but it also points to the boy playing the part (253); Shakespeare thus blurs gender boundaries and shows us how “commodity” involves men, women and also theatre, which was producing plays as commodities and selling them for profit. Since plays

were performed by professional actors, scholars such as Bernard Beckerman have regarded the acting profession itself as objectifying its actors. He notes that an actor had to cultivate a fabulous memory as well as “systematize his methods of portrayal and of working with his colleagues” (130), like a labourer selling his worktime on a piecemeal basis.

Following Beckerman’s analysis, the money that people were paying to see the play-as-commodity was also turning actors into commodities. Moreover, some playhouse owners were also involved in the business of prostitution, which links the profession to Dekker’s notion of commodified whores. However, we shall see that Shakespeare’s representation of actors, and even prostitutes, affords alternative interpretations; we have to bear in mind how overlapping meanings of the commodity enable Shakespeare to represent the new mercantilist model throughout society and in ways that we may not, at first, expect. Having now given a flavour of some of the key meanings of “commodity” circulating in the medieval and early modern periods, I will turn next to the methodological approaches which seem most useful for my study of the representation of commodity in Shakespeare’s theatre.

#### **1.4 Methodological approach**

In this thesis, I have employed an essentially pragmatic methodological approach to the study of commodity, and commodification, in Shakespeare. I have adopted insights from Gender and Ethnic Studies, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, as well as Marxist and New Economic Criticism. The topic has already been widely studied in the English-speaking world in a cross-disciplinary manner. For example, critics address the commodification of a single gender (normally women) or that of a specific ethnic or religious group. In order to show the benefits of a multi-faceted approach, I will examine the ways scholars have analysed the handkerchief in *Othello*; indeed, what starts out as a personal gift becomes a fetishised commodity and the characters, whatever their gender, become increasingly objectified as a consequence; a multi-theoretical approach thus appears to be the best one to add important insights to our understanding of the handkerchief.

Gender Studies Shakespeare scholars have argued that the handkerchief is the symbol of objectified female agents in *Othello*; they suggest it figures Desdemona’s body as a commodity. When Othello gives the handkerchief to his wife, it is thus interpreted to signify a “pledge of his love and possession of Desdemona and of her sexual fidelity” (Neely 129). Susan Frye concurs with Judith Dusinberre on the concept of Desdemona’s “virginity as a property asset” (52) and sees that the handkerchief is interchangeable with “Desdemona’s sexuality and his honour in possessing a chaste wife” (223). Evidence to support such theories is provided in

Shakespeare, since the choice of the word “whore” to describe Desdemona is introduced to the play by Othello at the same time as his demand for the “ocular proof” (3.3.365) of her infidelity. Likewise, Iago sets up a parallel between Desdemona and Bianca, Cassio’s whore: “A hussy that by selling her desires / Buys herself bread and cloth” (4.1.92-93). In a Gender Studies framework, the object, like Desdemona, is hence thought of as a symbol of purity and exclusive possession at first, yet it progressively takes on the traits of a widely circulated commodity.

Once the device of the handing around of the handkerchief is brought into the play, Desdemona is also figured as merchandise. She is no longer beholden to sole ownership within the terms of her marriage contract, nor can she resume the unadulterated qualities that made her valuable to Othello. She is thus put out for (sexual) employment on inclusive market terms by her own husband: “Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn. / Sir she can turn and turn, and yet go on / And turn again” (4.1.249-251). Even though Desdemona is not of Bianca’s status, she henceforth personifies the qualities characteristic of a prostitute and the link between the two women is held to be made clear by the reference to the handkerchief. It is passed from one to the other via Cassio, who gives “the napkin” (4.1.174) to Bianca so she can copy it. The feminist critic Dymphna Callaghan accordingly thinks male characters’, such as Iago’s, “misogynistic discourse” (127) simply relegates Desdemona further in a transformation from domestic commodity to sex-worker. For Carol Neely (in line with Karen Newman’s more nuanced idea of women’s relationship to commodities as “multiple: at once goods, sellers of goods and consumers of goods” (“Fashioning” 133), the lost handkerchief becomes the emblem of all the women’s power in the play “and its loss” (128), when Othello loses faith in his wife’s love.

Some Feminist critics see objectification, whereas others add an Ethnic Studies approach, focusing on European and African customs. For example, Ayanna Thompson attributes to the handkerchief the meaning of an inverted mirror in miniature to the display of the hymenial blood-stained wedding night bed sheets, which was a joint European and African custom (51). She is referring to the emblematic embroidery that spots the handkerchief with strawberries. Iago is the first to allude to the impurity of the female character through the stage prop when he remarks: “Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief / Spotted with strawberries in your wife’s hand?” (3.4.439-440). Lawrence J. Ross’ analysis of the emblem of the strawberry in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* as “either of the good or uncorrupted man or of the seemingly good man, the hypocrite” (229) looks towards its use in *Othello*. The strawberry’s customary association with the serpent that would traditionally lurk hidden in its foliage provides a direct meaning of “perils of feminine beauty and illicit love” (Ross 231). It is here

that we can turn to an Ethnic Studies interpretive approach that involves commodified men as much as women: the demand can be devised as symbolically objectifying the formerly enslaved Othello, by attempting to turn the handkerchief, the emblem of the Moor's social relationships, into an alienated European product.

Other scholars have thus understood the handkerchief as a symbol of white male authority. Ian Smith, for instance, sees the handkerchief as objectifying Othello, because of the object's African origins. Likewise, as the handkerchief is an intangible emblem of Othello's African lineage and a perceptible symbol of marital fidelity, it "brilliantly weaves together the familiar civility of the luxury commodity or status object and the alienating strangeness of the African fetish" (Vanita 342); Shakespeare suggests that magic was involved in the handkerchief's making since the worms that bred the silk to make the cloth were "hallowed" (3.4.71). Such imagery recalls the "divine-made-visible" in the previously condoned sacred iconography of the pre-Reformation era that many audience members would still be familiar with (Sofer 71). In Margo Hendricks' interpretation, the handkerchief represents how "the English engagement with 'foreigners' often functioned on two levels: spiritual and material", with the Christian outlook on the world acting in opposition to that of the Jew or the Muslim (4). Put differently, the commodity of the handkerchief is seen not only to be a symbol of objectification but of racialisation.

Elsewhere, James Hodgson draws on Marx to call the handkerchief an emblem of Desdemona's "reputation", a fetishised object as longed for by her husband as her "virgin-stained bed-sheets" (Kolin 23). Hodgson's interpretation reminds us of Marx's adaptation of Ludwig Feuerbach's ideas in *The Essence of Christianity*, since the handkerchief, made and given to Othello by his mother, still implies a personal and affective social nexus for Othello, unlike Iago, since the object's value is uniquely mediated through notions of expedient revenge for Othello passing the ensign over for promotion and potential material gain. Then again, Honigmann remarks how the handkerchief brings multiple realities "to light" (72). As such, his reading can be likened to the Post-Marxist (Hawkes "Theory" 42) Foucault's definition of *parrhesia*, or telling all, in that the object becomes the ocular manifestation of the different "truths" about the handkerchief circulated in the play. The *parrhesia* spoken through Iago's illicit use of the stage prop functions as an oppressive mechanism "saying anything, saying whatever comes to mind without reference to any principle of reason or truth" (Foucault "Courage" para. 18). In this interpretation, Othello is corrupted by Iago's manipulation of the figurative power embodied in the love token. He then literally becomes an object of revenge when he takes Desdemona's life. The handkerchief here can be said to render tangible the

concept of pejorative *parrhesia* because Othello loses all reason and his self; he acts as a tyrant and murderer, regardless of rationale or legitimacy. Following this interpretative approach, we see how characters perceive in objects a sense of ideological truth and rightness, setting aside all intellectual logic as they do so.

Likewise, during the overhearing scene (4.1), Othello insists that the handkerchief reveals Desdemona's adultery:

OTHELLO      Lie with her? Lie on her? We say 'lie on her', when they belie her. Lie with her? Swounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief. To confess, and be hanged for his labour. First to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief? O devil (*Othello* 4.1.34-41)!

When he murders his wife, he enacts retribution for the spoken "truth" of the object, rather than challenging that truth. For Othello, as in the pre-Cartesian concept of *parrhesia*, the coincidence between belief and truth takes place in verbal activity rather than a "certain (mental) evidential experience" (Foucault "Meaning" para. 11). If Othello's *parrhesia* can no longer fit in our "modern epistemological framework" (Foucault "Meaning" para. 11), Shakespeare anticipates new paradigms by giving the term "confess" both a religious sense and representing it within the realm of the market. Othello's chiasmus ("confess, hanged, hanged, confess") includes the "labour" that was involved in the handkerchief's making; the handkerchief was a product of manual effort. God and man's action are thus projected onto the handkerchief; it is given both celestial and earthly agency. Religion would thus seem to be one of the keys with which to unlock the secret of the anthropomorphic object. Marx also argues in the first chapter of *Capital* that there is a definite connection between the product of human labour and the "mist enveloped regions of the religious world [where] the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings" (para. 4). Unlike the idol, which is always recognised as such (Hawkes' interpretation of "custom" replacing "nature"), the fetish closes the individual in a trap of being controlled by his own creation. The handkerchief is a man-made creation but as it embodies characteristics that Othello considers supra-sensible, he begins to obey the object that he created. In a Marxist sense, he once again becomes a slave; Iago's reinforcing and deforming exchange in the early modern marriage market results in Othello's

African socialised self becoming an economically determined one, defined by an impersonal English understanding of the handkerchief. Shakespeare thus reminds contemporary spectators of their own vulnerability to such subservience and anticipates, by three hundred years, Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

Foucault does remind us of an alternative *parrhesia*. The term also means telling "the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament which might encode or hide it" ("Courage" para. 19). In *Othello*, the indisputable truth of the handkerchief again substitutes itself for the person speaking the truth (the parrhesiastes) "who has the moral qualities which are required, first, to know the truth, and secondly, to convey such truth to others" (Foucault "Meaning" para. 12). A striking Renaissance parallel with how Othello's handkerchief is proof of profiteering, rather than a guarantee of quality, was the early modern gold-thread industry: when gold and silver manufacture became a royal monopoly in 1618 it was nonetheless conducted with what William Robert Scott terms as "a reckless disregard of the most rudimentary commercial morality". He continues: "The silver and the silk were 'sophisticated' shamelessly. Lead or quick-silver was mixed with the silver; and a workman was brought from Italy, who could dye silk 'with an advantage of weight', whereby an addition of one third was made" (177).

A striking modern-day parallel could be drawn with Hans Christian Anderson's 1837 fairy tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, which tells the story of how a child provides a self-obsessed state ruler with a totally new understanding of his true nature: the Emperor falls prey to two crafty weavers' commodity scam (they steal his silk and gold while claiming to be producing a special cloth that, in fact, does not exist); during a procession, a little child cries out that the Emperor has nothing on at all (as Thomas Middleton's character, Mother Gruel, puts it in *Michaelmas Term* (1605?): "It may well be said that truth goes naked" (55.3.160)) but the Emperor continues to parade in his underpants. The universally levelling tale is funny because the obviously nude Emperor carries on as if nothing has happened; the story also, however, fills us with a painful uneasiness because there is no breakdown of ego resulting in self-knowledge and comforting change. The Emperor's character is not rounded by experience, he simply surrenders to commodity; as such, there is no elevation of vision or any space for improvement at the end of the plot.

All through this thesis, we shall see impressive examples of Shakespearean *parrhesia*: the repeated act of truth-telling about commodity (notably, for example, by Gloucester, Paulina, Beatrice, Isabella, Jack Cade, Talbot or Williams) that packs a punch to the pretentious part of their superiors' ego and would have significantly gratified the popular part of the



audience. We also see, less impressively, how this *parrhesia* has little impact on the consciousness of the commanders. The agonising and very central question of the commodity, while it leads to a possibility of an examination of life for audiences, never leads to character growth through instruction. When Emilia, Iago's wife, provides evidence of Desdemona's innocence (5.2), the tangible presence of the handkerchief provides visual proof to challenge her husband's claim to authority: he is condemned to "silence as a discipline or as the requisite condition for the contemplation of God" (Foucault "Meaning" para. 9). After his arrest, Iago does retreat into silence: "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know: / From this time forth I never will speak word" (5.2.309-310), and yet, the truth of Desdemona's innocence is not honoured, Iago refuses to show any self-awareness, there is no frankness, no final link to any Christian or other moral law through autonomy or sense of responsibility. Instead, Iago's silence seems a cynical mockery of Christian contemplation, a death knell that highlights how characters, and by extension society, had become increasingly divorced from the human sphere.

In fact, as the handkerchief circulates within a non-dominant network of mercantilism, a (Structuralist Marxist) paradox persists in that the audience is left wondering whether the fetish retains all the authority or whether there is any social structure at all. Within this framework, the handkerchief can replace all other ideologies in the play: the doctrines that allow a class, sex or colour to exert authority over others, unless, as Foucault observes, "you accept the [good] parrhesiastic game [where] you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken" ("Meaning" para. 17). Following Foucault, I suggest that there are multiple ways to perceive the symbolic "truth" of the handkerchief in *Othello*; and, just as a multi-faceted theoretical approach is significant for interpretation of the handkerchief, I believe that taking into account different viewpoints on commodity in general is also important for my thesis.

Although it is not directly relevant to the handkerchief, New Economic Criticism or Broad-Spectrum Criticism is also useful for this thesis. They study commodity and societal relations by examining the crossing points between literature and money as a form of representation for social interaction. Peter F. Grav details its approach as follows: "Historical contextualization is a mainstay of early modern New Economic Criticism, but the focus seems fixed on broader economic trends and events, such as the usury debate" (Abstract). Lars Engle explains that New Economic critics view social interaction at the time as "an economy, a diffuse network of discursive transactions which hang together according to humanly established (and thus mutable) patterns of exchange" (3). If it is to succeed in its research purpose "the most successful economic criticism must combine several angles of attack" (Woodmansee and

Osteen 36). These include close reading, since literary interpretation implies the essential act of our “respective associations between rhetoric and ethos” (Bruce [Abstract]) and the need to approach the texts from the most objective and wide-ranging angles as possible. The representation of commodity in Shakespeare’s theatre thus connects generations, laws, political and moral decisions and monetary transactions throughout early modern society. It is the subject of command and the expedient object of desire that accords authority to characters whilst at the same time depriving them of agency. Looking at the insight afforded by the various approaches to Othello’s handkerchief in particular and commodity in general suggests the need to explore the topic from multiple theoretical standpoints.

For each chapter, I have selected the approaches which seem most relevant for the topic at hand. Inspired by the methodologies described above, I have undertaken an analysis of instances of the term “commodity” in Shakespeare, because it was a word undergoing significant semantic modification in early modern England, and can thus help uncover early modern tensions and resistance to commodification of men and women at all levels of early modern society. Similar studies in the field have used this kind of method successfully. For example, Linda Kay Stanton, in *Shakespeare’s “Whores”* (2014), analyses all the incidences of the word “whore” in Shakespeare’s works with a study of his characters traditionally associated with whoredom, to make the assertion that a certain degree of feminine liberty could be achieved despite their denigration.

In this research I assume that people’s reactions and stories are important; meaning can be made out of chronicle, statement, description, version or plot, and these accounts can tell us something useful about society because they are social products. From this perspective, the way the story is told in Shakespeare’s theatre is just as important as the facts, that is, the quantitative data of the period. However, as inductive enquiry in Shakespeare’s theatre is not an isolated concept from the rest of early modern society, it requires foundation in objective (numerical) historical fact connected to the subjective (textual) data. Examples of complementary research methodologies include authoritative scholarship such as Andrew Gurr’s. They also comprise textbooks on social questions such as Susan Dwyer Amussen’s *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (1988) that studies families, property and family economies at this time and has also been an important source. Research carried out in political, legal, and institutional history by Tudor experts such as John Guy in *Tudor England* (1988) or Norman Jones in *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (2002) has also been closely analysed. The research design thus acknowledges the history of thinking and



alternative research architectures in this area whilst studying Shakespeare to substantiate new claims.

In addition to Shakespeare's plays and selected works of other dramatists, I have examined other documents which help to connect "economic matters with larger social, political and cultural questions" (Drakakis Personal communication). For example, documents on behalf of private profit-making enterprises, such as John Wheeler's *A Treatise of Commerce* (1601), are discussed. Similarly, John Stow's *A Survey of London* (1598), T[homas]. E[dgar]'s *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632) that documents the statutes, customs and laws concerning women at that time or Philip Stubbes' *The anatomie of abuses* (1595) that correlates prostitution and theatre and are a strong diatribe against both have also been valuable sources of information. For other chapters, royal proclamations have also been examined, such as Elizabeth I's *Proclamation against Excess of Apparel* (15 June 1574) that was a specific law relating to dress codes, or *A proclamation against vagarant souldiers and others* (1589) that forbade poor former Spanish Armada soldiers from selling off their armour as a means of subsistence. Especially concerning commodity and the state, comparing and contrasting Sir Thomas More's writings or the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed have proved useful in finding out how monarchs ostensibly maintained their hegemonic positions and subdued opposition in a society no longer in a dependent relation to a feudal cultural premise.

Using published primary and secondary sources I have carried out in depth research to access narratives and assert the transformation in the conception of value in early modern society as depicted by Shakespeare's theatre. I have viewed this understanding from a *Verstehen* perspective, or what Liz Snape and Dawn Spencer call "studying people's lived experiences which occur in a specific historical and social context" (7). In other words, I have been trying to research early modern life from an early modern viewpoint, context and using early modern concepts from an "insider perspective" (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey 18). Nonetheless, theories have been linked to the collection of data: those of Marx upon the move from a feudal to a capitalistic society thanks to commodities and their monetary equivalents. His ideas are relevant to this research because they hypothesise a foundation for how and why early modern literary characters make behavioural decisions and choices. Above all, the acknowledgement of Marx's theory and its developments has helped refine research questions and give a clearer vision of the principal spheres of the research study. Later concepts can help decipher whether notions are communally implanted within a particular social system of significance (Hennick, Hutter and Bailey 42) or whether Shakespeare ultimately allows spectators to form their own opinions.

Having now explained my methodological methods, I will turn next to how I have organised the thesis.

### 1.5 Overview of chapters

This thesis is divided into nine chapters and is designed to map out different areas of representation of commodity in Shakespeare's theatre and the important ways the ideas of commodity are developed. In Chapter Two, I examine the historical background, specifically elements involving commodity that signal the shift from a medieval to a mercantilist culture and serve as a backdrop to Shakespeare's representation of it. Then, in Chapter Three, I concentrate on the five plays including the term "commodity" and where intergenerational struggles also mark a transition from an older world view to a more modern one: *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. I here deal with how etymology and drama interact to demonstrate the passage from the old generation sustenance sense of commodity, meaning "measure", "fitness" or "convenience" to "profit" and "gain" based on the new generation purchasing power of money. Although this can mean a healthy increase in living standards and comfort, the migration also establishes conspicuous, often unnecessary, commodity consumption as a central striking entity in early modern England's new structure. What we see is that when representatives of previous notions of commodity pass away, younger characters take the stage to wreak havoc with traditional forms of (essentially patriarchal) authority.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, for instance, Antipholus of Syracuse unambiguously associates "commodities" and (his own) "body" (4.3.9). He does so against the background of the bustling Ephesian market place where he is eventually reunited with his lost twin. Shakespeare is comparing the case of the twins' parents, who have been estranged from their family and factors that combine towards the more profitable practice of commodity exchange (symbolised by the circulating gold chain) that causes comic chaos before leading to family reunion. Similarly, in *The Merchant of Venice*, different types of commodity identify old and young characters and Antonio's loan to Bassanio to court Portia: "Neither have I money nor commodity / To raise a present sum. Therefore go forth – / Try what my credit can in Venice do; / That shall be racked" (1.1.178-181). While the father-son bond between the two male characters is significant ("money/commodity", "credit") in that Antonio's reputation ("credit") is sufficient enough to guarantee a high amount to obtain another excellent commodity (Portia), Antonio nearly literally forfeits his life, which stages the risks of commodity exchange. Shakespeare shows how younger characters make a profit from tangible commodities (money,

the caskets, Portia's manipulation of her father's will, her ring) and decrease confidence in former notions (comfort and rights as a surrogate father).

Similarly, in the French and Italian set *All's Well That Ends Well*, which includes a bed trick in which women are framed as commodities, Paroles makes an explicit link between intangible maidenhead and securing its hard cash value by warning Helena that virginity is "a commodity will lose the gloss with lying: the longer kept, the less worth" (1.1.142-143) and commends that she "off with't while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request" (1.1.143). Helen accordingly sells a cure to the ailing King of France in a profitable trade-off for his ward, Bertram. The King's surrogate son, confined to a role of love object, refuses discussion and flees to Italy where he is distracted by Diana and produces his ring (the objectified form of both his aristocratic lineage and his wedding vows), only to his own disadvantage. These factors refuse to combine to foster an atmosphere conducive to former notions of commodity, and the play's argument finally comes down in favour of making whatever financial outlay is required. Above all, the play's conclusion suggests that new forms of commodity just induce extra costs for male characters (Bertram, the King of France) without any real benefits.

This last idea is continued in the figure of the blinded Duke of Gloucester, who utters the word "commodities" in *King Lear* (4.1.19-24) in belated recognition of the benefits of general comfort over profitable personal self-interest. The impact on the individual of "commodities" brings attention to the dual phenomenon of increasing material wealth at the same time as objects were becoming a source of imprisonment and increasing anxiety. It is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare's use of "commodities" here involves the confrontation of characters with the impression that the wealth gained can only be counterfeit or illusory. Commodity here signifies insecurity because dictated by the deceptive prosperity brought by objects rather than clearly defined family ties that have less monetary worth but a value that is recognised, only too late, by Gloucester. Moreover, Shakespeare totally refutes the idea of commodity as meaning comfort thanks to Hermione's defiant use of the term during the scene of her trial in Sicily for wrongly accused adultery in *The Winter's Tale*, when she says: "To me can life be no commodity" (3.2.91). Her poised and powerful speech just before her son Mamilius' off-stage death (3.2.141-143), where she denies that commodity (comfort) can give her life any meaning or value, and that her own physical existence as a queen, wife and mother be objectified (Drakakis Personal communication), defies the diktats of a reifying culture. Ironically, if Hermione survives, it is largely thanks to Paulina's commodity scam involving the statue: Paulina is also a wife who loses her husband and who, after calling the King a "tyrant" (3.2.205), hides the queen away for sixteen years and then has her reappear in

the form of another object, a statue, to amaze the king and enable the remaining family's final reconciliation. In these five plays, individual development thanks to new forms of commodity upturns former authoritarian models. Children are seen to rule their parents and women rule men. What was formerly regarded as natural has become unnatural as younger strengths take over. New forms of commodity, however, are often misused and exposed as such in the plays. This leaves the way open for the spectators to reflect upon what the power of commodity is, whether it is just and whether there is a possibility of a different kind of ruling authority.

Chapter Four turns to how early modern England governed prostitution, a topic that has previously been addressed from the viewpoint of male abuse of power. By focusing on commodity, within the framework of London's Southwark area and its performance-related context, however, we see how in theatre commodity is most importantly the body of the actor, without which the words in Shakespeare's text cannot be performed. By extension, the play is a commodity mirroring and serving some spectators, who were themselves considered embodied objects: the prostitutes in the audience come to ply their trade or simply watch a play. Thus, in some instances, commodity can be a theatrical tool to undermine the deprivation of agency and maintain dignity. I thus examine how fact, fiction and status overlap using the examples of the brothel scenes in *Henry IV* and in *Pericles*, where the Bawd and her husband, the Pander, buy prince Pericles' daughter Marina from pirates but only keep her long enough in their brothel to realise that her purity and ability to dissuade her potential customers would make her a more lucrative "piece" (17.122) of flesh elsewhere. The Pander thus despondently remarks: "O, our credit comes not in like the commodity, nor the commodity wages not with the danger" (16.26-27), with commercial wordplay ("credit", "commodity", "wages") suggesting his disillusionment. Commodity here allows for a full account of the literature on early modern theatre and prostitution, weaving together social, cultural and theatrical history to bring up both economic and gender issues of commodity and commodification. The examples of *Henry IV* and *Pericles* have been chosen as unique instances in Shakespeare's work of direct representations of brothel activities to provide an original contribution to a topic that has been extensively discussed. My findings prompt me to suggest that prostitutes commanded the potential to transfer, perturb and shape social norms more than they have often been given credit for, while their clients only conserve their agency thanks to Machiavellian manoeuvre or lose their identities due to their own monetary representation. I hence combine the two very different brothel contexts as a way of thinking beyond categories of victimisation and objectification, and show that the overlapping theatre business and sex business have common implications that necessarily bind them together both in the imagination and in fact.

In Chapter Five, the question of woman-as-commodity is further considered and opposed since Shakespeare's female characters assertively occupy both horizontal and vertical (stage) space, countering male claims to its control. Male characters are also represented as submissive dupes to commodity or are even objectified themselves. As such, women characters and early modern marriage mores (marriage had become one of the lucrative early modern means of fortune hunting and enrichment) can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Differing viewpoints on commodity (merchants anxious to be allied to aristocratic blood and needy aristocrats anxious to be married to money) are a preoccupation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, where ideas that, like merchandise, a woman's body decays with time if it is not invested wisely (to produce male heirs) are laughed at: "'Twas a commodity lay fretting by you; / 'Twill bring you gain, or perish on the seas" (2.1.320-321). As a commodity, Baptista offers his eldest daughter as the cheaper item at the beginning of the play. The important thing to notice, however, is that Katherine turns the situation around to her advantage. Shakespeare plays with the commodity trope to the last, if we subscribe to the viewpoint that her final speech, after all that comes before, successfully negotiates early modern marriage mores. As an interim conclusion, I could say that the early modern commodity model is one that shares space (Katherine as a budget balancing housekeeper/Petruchio as a breadwinner), or is, more radically, resisted rather than restored (Katherine as a wheeler-dealer housewife/Petruchio as a commodified husband obliged to go out into the world to earn their living).

To fully explore the representation of commodity from spatial perspectives, I then turn to *Much Ado About Nothing*, where spectators witness an occasion for making profit from Margaret's body, disguised as Hero's, in an upper casement window. Yet, this is only until the schemers get caught out at it and risk the night watch's cudgels; Borachio fears: "We are like to prove a goodly commodity, being taken up of these men's bills" (3.3.156-157). "Hero" calling down to her supposed lover as a prostitute is thus detrimental to the men's characters, not hers. More generally, Shakespeare uses the word to interrogate manipulation and misinterpretation in the play: "A commodity in question, I warrant you" (3.3.158). As in *All's Well that Ends Well*, commodity here induces extra costs without any real benefits for men; Hero (or Margaret in the guise of Hero) appearing at the window gains power through Claudio's discreditable conception of her as a lesser commodity (a whore). Moreover, he loses agency through his association with gulls to commodity, or the minor characters in the play who are completely commodified. While spectators' understanding could have been restricted to a very limited idea of female agency thanks to gendered expectations of a woman's place in early modern England, the negotiation of space in the plays under consideration affords more

complex interpretations that combine conventional sexual morality and emerging mercantilist concepts.

In Chapter Six, I show how men are further commodified thanks to the questions of commodity desire and loss of male self in *Measure for Measure*. In fact, Pompey's dour assessment of the little profit to be made from a Viennese prostitute's body within the context of war, bubonic plague and a collapsing economy can be applied to the whole of Viennese society: "First, here's young Master Rash; he's in for a commodity of brown paper and old ginger" (4.3.3-5). Shakespeare's metaphor becomes staged realism involving commodity within the closed-in dystopic universe of Vienna. He uses a patterned structure of knowledge, experience, Eros and Thanatos to show his characters as commodities on stage. Commodity is the dramatic tool and anthropomorphic character in *Measure for Measure* that creates, gives momentum to and is the catalyst for an agglomerate of micro-fictions, where Master Rash can be Claudio, Pompey, Angelo or even the Machiavellian Vincentio. For, if the Duke has used Angelo to earn prestige and win Isabella, she uses both men to her own advantage or "use" (to save her brother and her virginity) in an extended monetary trope motivated by familial and mercantilist considerations.

Similarly, Chapter Seven analyses how the displacement of authority towards commodity affects the male soldier, dressed to represent state authority but who is actually coined by commodity regardless of rank; monetary representation of men in the armed forces suggests that soldiers as "commodities" were a defining feature of early modern society. Talbot in *1 Henry VI* might be expected to revive the flame of patriotism thanks to historical distance and nostalgia and yet spectators are in for a double disappointment: not only is Talbot's story not quite as they might have imagined but, as Shakespeare's fiction colonises past realities, he stages events through the lens of heroes as commodities. When, in *2 Henry VI*, a rebel uses the term to claim more rights: "My lord, when shall we go to Cheapside and take up commodities upon our bills?" (4.7.132-133), Shakespeare shows disbanded soldiers struggling to survive, and commodity becomes a metaphor for state shortcomings. David Hawkes comments how Shakespeare's status as an "upwardly-mobile bourgeois" playwright did not dispose him to sympathise with the lower orders ("Theory" 36). But surely here we see that, as Shakespeare probably began his career as a young actor or "hired man" (Ackroyd 120), he would have at least had some understanding, and perhaps even compassion, for the underdogs in the societal struggles of the period.

Resisting commodification is also a plausible concern of the playwright since, if both he and his father, John Shakespeare, were landowners and usurers (Ackroyd 15, Hawkes 36),



the latter was fined many times for being a Recusant (refusing to attend the services of the Church of England). To avoid having his land confiscated as punishment, John Shakespeare simply conveyed his property to safe hands in arrangements with family and friends to have it later returned to him (Ackroyd 56). Similar commodity arrangements characterise Sir John Falstaff, widely considered a development of the Vice character in the medieval morality plays and who Ackroyd suggests was modelled on John Shakespeare; both men's family life, business and civic careers being "organised simultaneously" (15). Through Falstaff, Shakespeare theatrically voices the concept of commodity as a contrast to honour. First, as we saw earlier, Falstaff jokes about trading reputation in *1 Henry IV*: "I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought" (1.2.73-74). He then profits from the bribes of able-bodied soldiers to avoid service and enlists unfit crew, "a commodity of warm slaves" (4.2.16-17), without the financial means to escape war. What is more, in *2 Henry IV*, the character associates bodily illnesses (gout and venereal infection) and debt before explaining how he aims to transform the physical weaknesses related to his excessive lifestyle into an excuse to claim a war pension: "A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity" (1.2.226), he claims. In the end however, Falstaff is rejected by Prince Hal leading to the conclusion that Shakespeare's treatment of the military shows how, if soldiers resisted their condition, they nonetheless experienced a moribund life or a living death that was essentially beholden to commodity or its monetary equivalent.

In Chapter Eight, we see that even the exalted figure of the soldier-king can be associated with a commodity. Here, I further examine concepts of national embodiment by its soldier-ruler and the "crown" (whether this be a symbol of office or a mere coin). This single word enables me to show how *Henry V* continues to undermine the traditional kinds of authority associated with kingship (that Hal's father had begun to destroy due to the usurpation of Richard II's crown) even as Henry V sustains his reign with hypocrisy and parades his status. As such, regal relations are presented as commercial dealings and kingship can be seen as a matter of possession rather than responsibility. Early modern audiences had begun to understand that money was little more than a performative sign, since rulers had begun to mint coins with a stamp guaranteeing their weight rather than the bullion value of the precious metal they contained. Likewise, Henry's worth has a credit value of promise rather than any intrinsic weight. We see his crown was no longer the symbol of his legitimate authority but a vulgar emblem of the early modern dichotomy between essence and appearance that prompts awareness of how monarchy had become commodity, with perhaps less integrity than a player performing the role of a king on stage.

In the *Henriad*, Shakespeare shows how commodity overwhelms every aspect of early modern society in his pecuniary representation of self, soul and state. Since money “is the magical power that robs people and things alike of their natural and essential qualities” (Hawkes “Theory” 133), Shakespeare demonstrates objectification regardless of status. The playwright especially plays with the performative function of the monetary sign, of its “spin over use and truth, and above all of the rights and interests of money over those of humanity” (Hawkes “Usury” 11). As such, Shakespeare uses “crown” as a trigger word in *Henry V*, where the king’s objectification is also written through the other characters, who act as foils to his existential angst and show how he is not ethically adequate. By itself, the subjective dualism of crown commodity allows Shakespeare to expose the monarch’s vulgarity and forces Henry to hypocritically attempt to restore nobility thanks to its de-multiplied monetary representation. The play thus brings to life an expanded perspective of commodity and even possibly lays the groundwork for disengagement.

To sum up, moving from one area of representation to another, I am addressing the question of commodity in Shakespeare from a multifaceted theoretical approach. I include Marxist theory but avoid the more doctrinaire forms of classical Marxism since, with hindsight, we see that economic progress is not synonymous with social progress. Inexorable commercial growth using finite natural resources has not brought egalitarian collectivism but has simply begun our anthropological extinction. Shakespeare’s plays are seminal in understanding these early forms of commodification, both because they are perhaps one of the first forms of societal representation created specifically in the commodity form (exchange-goods to make profit from), and also because commodity is such an important theme in the stories they depict. Within the plays where the term “commodity” figures, three major themes can be established: the transition between old and new forms of commodity for men and women (or the actors playing them); the misguided use and abuse of commodity by male characters; and the extension of the notion of commodity to the head of state. In order to more fully set the historical context of these developments, I would now like to trace the history of commodity’s role in an emerging mercantilist culture, along with the tensions arising when medieval significations of commodity were giving way to its mercantile meanings.



## • CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As we have seen, mercantilism emerged due to a number of factors, including the fall of feudalism and the Calvinist idea that materialism could bring about human happiness; enclosure, which led to the decline of agriculture and the growth of small-scale industries desirous to export their surplus production for profit; an evolution in the banking system (actual gold, silver, and copper coins were being replaced by figurative moneys-of-account); and, the geographical discoveries of explorers such as Columbus (c. 1451-1506), Drake (c. 1545-1595) and Raleigh (1552-1618). State intervention in commercial activities for increased wealth and power promoted the phenomenon on both local and global levels from 1500 to 1750. We shall see in this section how mercantilism had many characteristics: commodities, self-reliance, nationalism, colonisation, foreign trade, money, profit and the generation of income from time spent at work. Financial contracts, rather than friendship or familial ties, were increasingly appearing as a factor of subordination of the social nexus, and the human body, to the rank of object *par excellence*. The shift from commodity to commodification is revealed thanks to Shakespeare's interest in commodity and money, which shows an awareness of the ubiquity of mercantilism in early modern society and how his audiences were experiencing it. In this chapter, I examine the historical development of mercantilist thinking that clearly provided inspiration for the representation of commodity in Shakespeare's theatre. I will start with how Shakespeare represents early modern mercantilism in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*, because the two examples justify the need for this historical background.

As William D. Grampp points out, it is customary to apply the term "mercantilism" both to the economic writings and practices of the early modern period. "It is also customary to describe mercantilism as the antithesis of liberal, or classical, economic doctrine" (465), he notes: referring to Adam Smith's criticism of mercantilism as useless, unwise or mischievous state intervention, as detailed in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Here Smith expounds what he sees as the greater merits of the "invisible hand": a metaphor for the notion of how opportunistic market players could alone bring about a system that was in the public interest. In Shakespeare, "classical" doctrines could refer to more ancient doxa. For instance, David Hawkes remarks that, in *Troilus and Cressida*, although the term "commodity" does not appear in the text, Ulysses prophesies the "slackening of feudal social relations" thanks to an opposition between "degree" ("the ordered relations of society based on blood and soil" and that meant concord, not equality, in a harmonious commonwealth) and "power": "the amorphous, unfamiliar but formidable force that was visibly and rapidly destroying those relations" ("Usury" 3):

ULYSSES    Then everything includes itself in power,  
                  Power into will, will into appetite;  
                  An appetite, an universal wolf,  
                  So doubly seconded with will and power,  
                  Must make perforce a universal prey,  
                  And last eat up himself (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.119-124).

The ancient laws had introduced the notion of order and made harmony correspond with the body of the ruler. In the same way that nature was harmonious and, by virtue of the laws of the analogy of signatures, it could be read in a universal way, external signs made it possible to decipher the universe. Correspondences could thus be found between the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (man). In other words, the laws of heaven were thought to radiate on earth with, at its centre, the nation's ruler, who mirrored the "planet Sol" (1.3.88), or sun. Ulysses earlier laments the chaos that threatens if the hierarchy is not respected: "O when degree is shaken, / Which is the ladder to all high designs, / The enterprise is sick" (1.3.101-103). I suggest that commodity in Shakespeare clearly stresses the chaotic aspect of early modern culture; material "power" can lead to the reversal of natural authority and allegiance (Manninen 2). *Troilus and Cressida*, a mix of comedy and tragedy, exemplifies the evolution from a magnanimous, if now powerless, form of feudal enterprise (personified by Hector who will refuse to fight with Ajax, because he is his cousin, which will not prevent Achilles from slaughtering Hector because of the death of Patroclus) to one that ignores any consideration of principle (embodied in the character of Ulysses, who comments on the codes of honour and war in a succession of speeches that makes him all talk and no action).

Like *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens* deals overtly with the consequences of diminishing social life and the values that hold it together. This is especially true for Timon's tirade at the beginning of Act 4, scene 1, which describes the loss of household government and respectful neighbourliness (Drakakis Personal communication):

TIMON

Piety and fear,  
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,  
Domestic awe, night rest and neighbourhood,  
Instruction, manners, mysteries and trades,  
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,  
Decline to your confounding contraries,

And let confusion live (*Timon of Athens* 4.1.15-20)!

Timon's is a remote ancient world that can nonetheless provide some perspective on Shakespeare's society increasingly peopled by adventurers. The character of Timon abandons the city and the company of his companions, among whom are flatterers (Lucius, Lucullus, Sempronius), false friends (Ventidius), or cynical philosophers (Apemantus). We first see Timon as a lord bountiful in a world of opulence peopled by courtiers; this contrasts with later images of a lonely and resentful man, who discards his fortune and is abandoned by his fellows. The ostentatious value of his money is all the better exposed because he spends it only on his flatterers, who abandon him to reveal the misfortune of a man whose generosity was not sufficiently informed. The indignation of betrayal serves to expose a charitable soul but also highlights the fact that misguided prodigality feeds the depraved as much as it serves to protect the needy; when money outstretches its purpose it enslaves and oppresses.

Timon's poor return on investment is all the more striking as it contrasts with the sumptuousness of the first part of the play. It is also highlighted by Apemantus, whose sarcasm serves to assert the unsociable Timon's invectives. Flavius, Timon's steward, also notes in the play: "When your false masters eat of my lord's meat? / Then they could smile and fawn upon his debts / And take down th'int'rest into their glutt'nous maws" (3.4.51-53). Exploiting a relationship for political or personal advantage was no longer synonymous with extreme political individualism, as this shift in representation of notions of debt and interest demonstrates. In this respect, ideas pertaining to controlling one's own destiny, without depending exclusively on outside help, become embedded in contracts with creditors (a pervasive phenomenon in the world of the theatre) as Amanda Bailey remarks:

The theater was an enterprise shaped by the exigencies of credit, but, more particularly, the businesses of playing revolved around the managers' and the players' reliance on the penal debt bond. Bonds enabled the building and leasing of playhouses. Playscripts, costumes and properties were obtained on bonds. And it was through the Articles of Agreement, known as the player's bond, that theatrical managers secured their labour ("Of Bondage" 4).

Especially relevant to a thesis on the topic of commodity is the fact that *Timon of Athens* was partly written by Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) (Johnson Personal communication). Middleton was the son of a wealthy London bricklayer, who died in 1586, which led to a

complicated fifteen-year law suit over the part of William Middleton's substantial estate that should have gone to Thomas when his mother remarried an adventurer, Thomas Harvey, in November of the same year; perhaps this explains why Middleton's comedies are largely "dominated by two of the great themes of literature dealing with the city, sex and money" (Taylor vii). Further, early in the 1600s, Thomas married Anne Marbeck, thus into a Calvinist family; as such, especially in his tragedies, Middleton may at times have adopted the moral position of Calvinism (an ethical framework of predestination by God of some to heaven and others to hell and even life and death, within which characters are de-humanised, unwitting players). On the other hand, free will and moral responsibility still operate: in *Timon of Athens*, for instance, Timon is seen to willingly divest himself of his riches; he also feels the human emotions of loneliness and resentment that provoke audience consideration. Conversely, Timon's "friends" include a poet and a painter, who personify the fictionality of the play medium and hence self-consciously represent, and destabilise, audience certitudes. Timon's world is altogether a place of ethical contradictions and confusion, as perhaps befits the creation of dramatists such as Middleton.

Thomas Middleton indeed became a prolific producer of plays: nearly fifty theatrical pieces, including about thirty stage plays, in twenty-five years. Brian Vickers (142) notes how Middleton was matriculated at Queen's college, Oxford in April 1598 although, by 1601, after coming down from Oxford, probably without graduating (Loughry and Taylor x) he spent most of his time with players, perhaps in the Curtain, since his family owned land adjoining the theatre. After three poems in 1601, Middleton collaboratively wrote *The Two Shapes*, *The Chester Tragedy* and a satirical comedy involving London's manners and morals, *The Family of Love*, in 1602. Philip Henslowe (c. 1550-1616) paid him for the first two and the third was written for one of the children's companies. For the Children of St. Paul's Middleton wrote *The Phoenix* and he went on to write another three plays for this company between 1604 and 1607 (*Michaelmas Term*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; *A Trick to Catch the Old One*). Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor note that all three plays work within the "so-called 'New Comedy' plot-structure established by the Roman dramatists, Plautus and Terrence" (xii); that is, a young man comes into conflict with his parents because he wants to marry one girl but they want him to marry another, so the young man has to successfully come up with a plan to outwit his parents and be reconciled with them at the end of the play.

Middleton's City comedies are very different to Shakespeare's comedies that are usually referred to as "romantic", since they are generally "festive, set in a faraway place, and concerned with the developing love-relationship of a young man and a young woman"

(Loughry and Taylor xii). In Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* (1604?, published in 1608), for instance, a silly old country gentlemen, Sir Bounteous Progress, is seen to pride himself on his generosity but is gulled by his nephew, Follywit (who is himself gulled into marrying a courtesan at the end of the plot), in an increasingly chaotic world, where courteous hospitality is being replaced by cozening, as Progress himself acknowledges: "This is the commodity of keeping open house [...] that makes so many shut their doors about dinner time" (2.6.51-52). *Michaelmas Term* (1605?, published in 1607) is an ironic depiction of society, whose inhabitants (including dishonest cloth merchants giving short measure of their commoditites or a country wench turning courtesan with the help of her father) are bedazzled by money and determined to get as much of it in any which way they can; after all, as the Country Wench puts it: "Do not all trades live by their ware [meaning both 'goods' and 'male and female genitals' (Taylor 338)] and yet called honest livers" (4.3.10-11). Finally, *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1606?, published in 1608) tells the tale of two rival usurers (Lucre and Hoard), who are so eager to better one another that they both let themselves be taken in by a crafty nephew called Witgood. Witgood has been cheated out of his inheritance by Lucre, Witgood thus makes believe the whore he is courting is a wealthy widow whom he is about to marry; he cheats his usurious uncle Lucre back out of his lands (Lucre holds the mortgage of Witgood's lands and hands over the papers to improve Witgood's prospects and in expectation of future gain); Hoard is tricked into marrying Witgood's whore; and, Witgood, freed from his debts and having comically gulled the usurers and creditors, marries Hoard's neice, thus making him both Lucre and Hoard's nephew.

*A Trick to Catch the Old One* contains elements from both the "New Comedy", where the father is harsh, the son, disobedient, and the medieval Morality Plays that follow the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the father figure is forgiving, the son, penitent. It, with the two other Middleton plays I mention here, contain common features to that of Shakespeare's more complex "Problem" comedies, such as *Measure for Measure* I study in Chapter Six. For instance, Witgood has been cheated out of inheritance but is a spendthrift and, at the beginning of the play, the audience sees him trying to rid himself of his virtuous love interest since she is not financially interesting enough. Further, Witgood displays skill and ostensibly administers justice through his scams to those who have wronged him and our aesthetic response is positive; nonetheless, the ease with which he partakes in the cozening provokes a negative ethical reponse and shows us just how morally complex, and mercantile, early modern society was. Returning to the main subject of the thesis, it would have been logical that Shakespeare call upon Middleton's services to help produce the complex tragedy of *Timon of Athens*. These first

two examples (*Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*) from Shakespeare, representing the chaotic effects mercantilism was having on society, have helped clarify the need for broader historical context, which is what I turn to now.

Lionel Charles Knights has significantly noted how Elizabethan drama owed “its fortunate development to the persistent patronage of the governing class, a class drawing its wealth mainly from the land and conscious of the encroachment of the ‘new men’ of commerce and industry” (9). In *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937), a work that “did so much to awaken critical attitudes to early modern acquisitiveness and chrematistics” (Johnson Personal communication), Knights notes too how the influence of the governing class (e.g. rhetoric, morals, religious outlook and education) was paralleled by popular idiom representing “corresponding advantages in habits of perception and discrimination, in emotional and intellectual organization” (11). While it may be argued that the Elizabethan-Jacobean gild system was both a guarantee of good work and diffused a commonly accepted sense of state responsibility to the public (Knights 26-27), the opening up of new markets and discovery of American gold and silver clearly stimulated nascent capitalism (Knights 35). For instance, Richard Carew informs us of how tin-mining in Cornwall and Devon was transiting from a gild system of surface mining done by “free miners” to one that necessitated capital outlay, and a capitalist mentality, for the use of deeper mining with pumps when the surface resources had been exhausted (Knights 64):

In this sort, some one Merchant will have five hundred pounds out beforehand, reaping thereby a double commodity, both of excessive gain for his loan, and of assurance to be served with tin for his money. This they say is no Usury, foorsooth, because the price of tin is not certainly known beforehand [...] But if to take above fifty in the hundred be extremity, whatsoever name you list to give it, this in truth can be none other than cutthroat and abominable dealing (15).

Other sources, such as John Wheeler’s *A Treatise of Commerce*, demonstrate how the new commodity ideology was encouraging mentalities to shift in what seemed a positive direction on social, political or cultural levels. Wheeler was a member of the romantically named “Merchants Adventurers of England”, who Wheeler estimates at 3500 freemen and who, more prosaically, shipped goods from English ports to ports in Holland or Germany within a carefully structured monopolistic framework (Hotchkiss 9). Thanks to this commercial organisation, which had begun business in 1505 under the title of “Merchants Adventurers” and



would adopt its more patriotic title from 1564 to 1689, Wheeler progressed from a humble birth (c. 1533) to become one of the wealthiest men of his hometown, Great Yarmouth, and a member of parliament by his death (c. 1611). Wheeler's is thus an account that maps a new English societal structure, in the sense of what David Hawkes terms the "economics of the *polis*, political economy, or what we call 'economics' today [where power] was shifting from the landed wealth of the aristocracy to the moneyed wealth of the bourgeoisie". Moreover, with the growing organisation of society around the market, the market grew ever more "influential over politics, culture and personality" ("Theory" 21, 26).

Simply put, Wheeler was a self-made business man who believed that the mercantile system which had enabled his success was a good system. He accordingly wrote what George Hotchkiss terms "the first example of commercial publicity in behalf of a private profit-making organization" (7) to counter the German Hanseatic League's trading privileges (the Merchants Adventurers would be expelled from Germany in 1597). Theirs was a dominant system since it traded at a lower flat rate than other merchants in exchange for loans and gifts to needy English kings that had ranged from Richard II to Henry VII. The powerful "Merchants of the Staple" based in the staple port of Calais were also important rivals as they had been given trading privileges in 1296 in exchange for collection of customs for the bulk of outward English commodities (Hotchkiss 11, 18), especially English wool and cloth. The staple system was one under which overseas trade in specific goods could only be transacted at certain designated market towns or ports ("staple ports") to monitor trade and ensure it as a source of tax revenue, as it forced foreign merchants to use their assets to buy English goods and prevented them from transferring bullion homewards. Calais, for example, was the staple port for wool and leather exports from 1363 to 1558 when it was repossessed by the French (Jenckes 79). If he did not support what was then seen as the dangerous doctrine of the right to trade as a natural right of every free born Englishman, Wheeler nonetheless promoted his upwardly mobile position as a Guild Merchant trader.

When he wrote his *Treatise*, the Merchants Adventurers Company was being denied its privileges and looked upon unfavourably by the people. In discredit with the cloth industry and unable to trade with Germany, where individual merchants were operating, the Company was being classed with the private monopolies Elizabeth I had awarded her favourites in salt, wine, tin and oil. As Knights remarks, by 1614 the charter of the Merchants Adventurers had been called in, exports of their cloth commodity prohibited and, by 1616, the whole cloth industry was in confusion (87). To begin with, it was, however, the monopoly, or the "exclusive possession or control of the trade in a commodity, product, or service" (OED 1534), legitimised

by Royal Charter: to the “Merchants Adventurers of England” in 1566, just as Royal Charter would be given to the “Levant Company” in 1581, the “East India Company” in 1601 and the “Virginia Company” in 1606. Apparently pioneering because of the sheer scope of the merchant adventuring that drew entire trade in certain commodities, traders and craftsmen had since the Middle Ages been preserving local social order by regulating their commerce and pillaging and trafficking had been carried out for centuries by crusaders or merchants on a global scale. The monopolies and charters simply established a trade free from traditional checks and according to profit-seeking “Tudor marketing policies and methods” (Hotchkiss 11). Their influence was such that, in relation to the South American continent: “By the close of the sixteenth century, bullion, primarily silver, made up over 95 percent of all exports leaving Spanish America for Europe. Nearly that same percentage of the indigenous population had been destroyed in the process of seizing those riches” (Stannard 221). The monarch had promised to consider monopolies after the public protest of 1597 but, unwilling to amend Crown prerogatives, parliament procrastinated until 1601 and the dispute of the monarch’s right to privilege would await the Stuart dynasty. That the middle-class Wheeler could air the Merchants’ case in a *Treatise*, published and circulated to several thousand persons shows that public influence was no longer confined to “the court and the peerage” (Hotchkiss 52-53). Wheeler’s narrative of the shift towards a national policy of commodity was perhaps not even understood as such, and the *Treatise* may have been little more than “good-will advertising”. It nonetheless points to “the outgrowth of the whole medieval attitude towards business” (Hotchkiss 11) Shakespeare inventively represents through “commodity” in his plays: in Wheeler’s own terms: “without merchandise, no ease or commodious living continueth long in any state, or commonwealth” (4).

In fact, the early modern mercantilist debate was full of commodity creativity and, as Bradley Ryner notes, “for mercantile writers, crafting an unassailable metaphor was synonymous with creating an abstract model of commerce” (85); merchants and playwrights alike found inspiration in the debate expounded by pamphleteers, such as those Johnathan Gil Harris calls the “Four Ms” (2): Gerard De Malynes, Thomas Milles, Edward Misselden, and Thomas Mun. The production of these mercantilist writers has shaped modes of expression of value, crisis and economic expansion and the discourse of trade as we know it. No student of early seventeenth century mercantile tracts can have failed to notice the abundant use of imagery in their statements defining trade. The commonwealth is a “household” or a “family”, the prince its “master” or “father” and commodities or their representation in currency are synonymous with the lifeblood flowing through both. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England,



men were already the physical and political “heads” of the “body” of State, and Parliament had legitimised Henry VIII’s supremacy over the Church. However, as John Guy notes, the new nation state was not a financially self-sufficient one since: “The sale of crown lands during the 1540s restored [finances but] by 1547 two-thirds of the ex-religious property had been alienated [...]. After Henry’s death the king could not ‘live off his own’ despite the great spoliation” (13-14). John Fortescue’s advice (“it is the king’s honour; and also [h]is office to make [h]is realm riche; and it is dishonour when he hath but a poor realm, off which men will say that he reigned but upon beggars” (139)) was, therefore, an ambition that could no longer be achieved on the basis of domestic land or tax revenue alone.

Venture thus became a byword for sovereignty; Elizabeth had no other way to pay the debts owing “but to use her merchant adventurers”, who, for example, stood “very stout in the matter by reason of this new custom and also for the 20,000l. that she owe[d] them”, wrote Thomas Gresham to Cecil, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1559. “Economy”, a term until then used almost exclusively to refer to the frugal management of domestic resources (OED “economy” etymology), was poised upon the threshold of a wider world that had meant European trading places giving way to Atlantic ports and money markets such as Antwerp or London (Buckley 589). Accordingly, merchant writers articulated their rudimentary theoretical concepts using the Renaissance fashion for imagery. There were two schools of thought that are commonly represented by the “Four Ms” introduced above: the Bullionists included Gerard De Malynes (c.1586-1641) and Thomas Milles (c.1550-1627), who defined a nation’s wealth by the quantity of precious monetary metals it owned; the mercantilist “Balance of Traders” like Edward Misselden (1608-1654) and Thomas Mun (1571-1641) advocated a positive foreign trade balance and international competition to increase riches.

The documents available to us bear witness to this evolution, a change that came about from a new, different, emphasis on self advancement, the loosening of feudal ties and the impact of an increasingly centralised and yet expansionist government. Julie Robin Solomon notes how:

The growing commercial economy [...] had corrosive effects on feudal economic and social structures. The loosening of feudal bonds, the appearance of the independent wage labourer, and the expansion of simple commodity production for the market paved the way for the development of more powerful and centralised royal regimes. Born in part out of the breakdown of feudal political relations at local level, and the expansion

of market and contract relationships, the centralised royal state shaped and was shaped by commercial activity (66).

Given Shakespeare's interest in metaphor to translate this evolution for his audiences, how the "Four Ms" established these modes of expression for value and crisis in their often-controversial debates over trade, could thus be of utmost interest from both a financial and a social perspective; indeed, these were also perspectives from which Shakespeare wrote his plays involving notions of commodity exchange.

As H. Buckley points out, overseas trade before the Renaissance was an anxious business due to the quality or quantity of coinage and the general prejudice against foreigners, which meant that no transaction was undertaken without the presence of a sworn broker. If the Bill of Exchange had alleviated the costs of shipping bulky commodity money and "permission" or "valued" money those of bad coinage (Buckley 590), attempts to establish fixed exchanges had failed as the regulations of the money-changing business applied to Foreign Exchange were inseparably connected with the domestic Mint regulations and the purpose of the control of money-changing was to prevent the export of English coin, in order to maintain its standard (593). This allowed businessmen such as Thomas Gresham (1519-1579), who, apart from being the instigator of the London Royal Exchange in 1566 was also the agent to the English Crown in charge of the sovereign's interests in Antwerp for most of the Tudor monarchs, to adopt an "innovative" (Buckley 594) approach to foreign commerce.

Gresham's speculative policy was essentially aimed at controlling business to his advantage. Thanks to the regular twice or thrice-yearly shipments of cloth to Antwerp by the Merchants Adventurers, he was able to set up a system under which the cloth-carrying ships would be arrested in England as soon as they were loaded and obliged to negotiate an exchange transaction which would mean paying out a large sum to him in Antwerp, in other words, an exchange rate higher than the market one. This quasi-exchange monopoly (the Merchants Adventurers having a quasi-monopoly on trade to Antwerp) managed to discharge the majority of sixteenth century royal debts but was only successful because it used coercion and price mechanisms to force up "the value of sterling in order to secure the perpetuation of the import of gold and silver" (Buckley 600). This led pro-interventionist pamphleteers to attempt to counter what they saw as unjust practices; they believed a country's wealth was defined by the amount of specie owned and that unfair exchanging of precious metals would result in a deficit of England's Balance of Trade (they thought high prices for imports pushed up their total bill and would not be compensated by export revenue, which was considered inelastic).

Gerard de Malynes was one such thinker. He was from a family of Lancashire mint-masters but born in Antwerp. His father, originally from Lancashire, was a mint master who returned to England in 1561 at the time of the restoration of the currency, when debased coins were being recalled, and then recoinced, in an attempt to curb inflation. Malynes himself worked in the Low Countries, where he acted as a commissioner for trade in 1586 before becoming a commissioner for establishing a true parity of exchange in 1600. Like his father, he was an assay master of the mint and would be appointed commissioner on mint affairs in 1609. Malynes' ideas resembled Thomas Wilson's in *A discourse vpon vsurie* (1584); this is a debate between "Ockerfoe, the Preacher or enemy to usury" who denounces the "want of charity" (17) in the world, and "Gromel gayner, the wrong merchant or evil occupier", an "Advocate or Civilian" and a "Lawyer, or rather petischoler in law" (85). Wilson denounces usury as a "certain gain due, or exacted for lending; [...] lawful theft, or a theft in law". He opposes usury to exchange, which, he notes, "according to the first institution thereof, is very good, and most necessary, without further talk, if they be honest and good themselves, that use it. And as the trade is very needful, the best way to maintain intercourse between merchant and merchant, country and country" (110). Like Wilson, Malynes was a life-long opponent of usury and, in his capacity as an international specialist in money, he logically extended his beliefs from the domestic to the foreign arena. As E. A. J. Johnson remarks:

In [Malynes'] opinion, to allow unrestricted purchase and sale of foreign exchange was to court disaster; such administrative nihilism would endanger the poor, would allow unscrupulous exchange dealers to fleece unskillful merchants. [And] he alleged that usury concealed in foreign exchange dealings would embarrass all English merchants and occasion an efflux of money (Abstract).

Malynes thus based his theories in support of regulated currency purchase upon arguments that had characterised previous anti-usury debates. Wilson's work largely inspired Malynes' *A Treatise of the Canker of England's Commonwealth* (1601), in which he reconditioned traditional Christian and Greek metaphors of good domestic management to support his ideas on overseas trade:

Nevertheless (as a commonwealth is nothing else but a great household or family:) yet the Prince (being as it were the father of the family) ought to keep a certain equality on the trade or traffic betwixt his realm and other countries, not suffering

an over balancing of foreign commodities with his home commodities, or in buying more than he sells. For thereby his treasure and wealth of the realm doth decrease, and as it were his expenses become greater, or do surmount his incomes or revenues (2-3).

Aristotle saith, that riches is either natural or artificial. The natural riches as lands, vines, forests, meadows, and such like. The artificial, as money, gold, silver, wools, cloth, and all other moveables and household stuff. Now as this artificial riches is proceeding of the natural riches, and that both these do receive their price and estimation by money (which is the measure and rule to set a price to everything:) so reason requires a certain equality between the natural riches of land, and the artificial riches of commodities proceeding of the same (5-6).

There was no control on the usury “concealed under an exchange transaction” (Johnson 451) and this is why Malynes advocated crown policy. His theory of value was thus comprised within a framework of parity, currency appraisal and government control and he called for equivalent legislation upon the purchase and sale of foreign exchange as that which had been implemented upon lending: “And thereupon the valuation of money makes the price of exchange for every place, [...] we ought to examine and compare our weight aforesaid, with the weight of other countries, [...] whether it be by the pound, crowne, duckett or doller, giving always value for value, which therefore was called *Par* (14-15). The *Canker* in the tract’s title is thus to be understood in the figurative sense of an external “destructive or corrosive agent [...] a malignant [influence that] corrupts, and is difficult to eradicate” (OED “canker”), just like “consume” in the medical or Biblical sense relating to the internal wasting or wearing down of a human body was gradually transmuting into senses linking to the exploitation of resources and the purchase of goods or services by a “consumer” (OED “consume” n. 6 b.). In Malynes’ terms, “as with a Canker the politic body of our weal public is overtaken; the cause thereof being predominant & overruling the course both of commodities & money” (“Canker” 18). This suggests that any internal imbalance was the result, not of domestic failure but of external faults, embodied in the form of “merchants strangers” intent on cheating the nation state of its riches (“Canker” 58-59).

In an allegory of international relations, Malynes transforms the head of the state into the “head of the exchange” who “is taken to bee at such a place or places where the price doth not alter, [...] the mutability of the price being with them of beyond the seas, in giving or taking still more or less of their money from time to time for our pound sterling” (“Canker” 28-29).

Indeed, when *A Treatise of the Canker of England's Commonwealth* was published, Malynes also had *Saint George for England, allegorically described* (1601) printed. Here, he revisits the legend of Saint George and the dragon; only the monster is called *Foenus Politicum* with its two wings, on the one side, *Usura palliata* (disguised usury or hidden interest) and, on the other *Usura explicata* (apparent usury), its tail being “inconstant Cambium” (fluctuating exchange rates designed to weaken English coinage and impede commercial exchanges). The dragon fights Saint George, whose mission is to defend the country's wealth. In this commercial reworking of the chivalric legend, the damsel in distress is the pure nature of the nation's riches that the King's authority must stop other countries' abusive exchange rates from feeding upon: “He is the right Cannibal, feeding only upon raw flesh, especially of men [...] He makes men fall into the mire, & the more money they stir, the more they are defiled, and brought into his danger” (Malynes 46-47). If Malynes' complaint, as Johnson notes, is essentially “symptomatic of increasing competition in foreign markets and a[n] attempt to attribute this to [...] the usurer” (452), he would nonetheless be joined in his combat by the less widely published Thomas Milles.

Milles was another denouncer of unfettered exchange practice as a violation of the duty of Christian charity as well as the Merchants Adventurers, which he saw as a cause of diminished crown revenue. And, like Malynes, he was a writer whose experimental expression of theory would also make large use of metaphor. In his 1608 tract, *The custumers alphabet and primer*, for example, he establishes the traditional moral and figurative foundations for his argument:

For when the Standard of Goodness in Gold and Silver is unsteadily fixed, & *Money* in weight inconstantly coined, for use unworthily Currant, as *Commodities* besides, [...] So the People of that Kingdome, grow troubled, and unquiet within themselves, according to the baseness of the Coyne when it is perceived (G2).

He then allegorises commodity exchange as another damsel in distress called “Traffike”: “Now see see my Lords, for Gods sake see, how Traffike falls a weeping, her pulse is weak, & her spirits fail, her face is pale and wan, at the name and sound of Staples, the want therefore so wounds her Soule, that her hart is set on bleeding” (H3). Undoubtedly, the idea of unnaturalness, of bodily harm or even death, was calculated to provoke concern. More than providing fascinating reading for those unversed in the early modern terminology of foreign trade, these early mercantilist tracts provide perspectives on differing concepts of value that Shakespeare

was also aware of. Moreover, for nearly twenty years the “Bullionist” metaphors held sway. Malynes even took part in schemes for developing lead and silver mines with the aim of making England independent of a foreign supply of precious metals. It was only when these failed and with the depression of the 1620s, crisis took hold of the textile industry, exports slumped and an outflow of bullion created a shortage of money, that belief in “value for value” and the passive nature of commodities and money was condemned. Nonetheless, Malynes continued to oppose the argument that a Balance of Trade deficit could be righted by a rising export demand in response to lower prices and refused to conduct further analysis in commodity movements. His intransigence unsurprisingly provoked opposition.

Malynes’ appointment to the standing commission on trade in 1622 (McNally “Political Economy” 29) effectively gave rise to criticism. It was at this moment that the “Bullionists” (Malynes and Milles) were countered by the “Balance of Trade” mercantilists (Mun and Misselden), who rejected the idea that exchange markets were independent of price markets and that rates could be determined by government policy alone in the same manner as the staple ports, the last of which was abolished on the continent in 1617 (Jenckes 79). The “Balance of Trade” writers too had a vested interest in commerce. Mun, for instance, was a member of the committee of the East India Company, and stood on the 1622 standing commission. He argued that goods, when re-exported, earned more than the silver originally invested to pay for them, and, as foreign trade was determined by the demand for commodities, the Balance of Payments determined the exchange rate, this being just another commodity price: “For let no man doubt, but that money is the price of wares, and wares are the proper use of money; so that their coherence is inseparable” (“Discourse” 27), he said. When he wrote *A discourse of trade, from England vnto the East-Indies* (1621), it was largely to refute Malynes’ claims that the East India Company, which financed its trade largely by the export of silver coin, was responsible for the depression. Written with the same verve as the Bullionist pamphlets, the tract counteracts assertions that unregulated exchange was unpatriotic or would further impoverish the needy or that “men were employed only so long as their work was immediately profitable to their employers” (Knights 138-139).

Despite these considerations, abandoning presumption for government intervention, the Free Traders such as Mun, or Edward Misselden (the deputy governor of the Merchant Adventurer’s Company at Delft, from 1623-1633 and another member of the 1622 standing committee), continued to postulate that international trade flows, not banking manipulations, governed exchange rates and movements of specie. Attempting to override Malynes’ egalitarian insinuations, Misselden’s 1623 tract, *The Circle of Commerce*, is mostly dedicated, not to

statistics, but to turning Bullionist arguments back against their defenders, for example: “The Stranger commits the fault, and Malynes would have the English punished A Rule most fallible, most unequal” (43). In Misselden’s tract, *Free trade. Or, The Meanes to make Trade Florish* (1622), associations between money and the body go further as free trade becomes a treatment with a mission to cure its patient, the sick nation, of its ills and stop the hemorrhage of business for the benefit of foreign nations: “And thus the *Hepatitis* or Liver vein of this *Great Body* of ours being opened & such profusion of the *Life blood* let out; & the *Liver* or fountain *obstructed*, & weakened” (10).

Upholding that “There cannot be too much *justice*, there may be too much *Law*” (32) and that “men’s time and means being spent in *Law*, [...] should be employed in *Trade*, trade is neglected and the *Commonwealth* deprived, of the benefit that might be purchased and procured thereby” (34), Misselden goes on to encourage free trade within organised cartels to overcome the negative effects for the commonwealth of the “*Warres of Pirates*” that hindered the importation of “ready money” or the “*warres of Christians*” (110) that were the cause of its exhaustion. If Malynes could tolerate the idea that regulated exchange operations were expedient because they limited the transportation of currency, he could not endure the idea of an outflow of specie for private profit and countered the Free Traders. In his response to Misselden, *The Circle of Commerce* (1623), Malynes thus denounces foreign exchange dealings as he had done twenty years previously and reminds us of the weighted bowl of Faulconbridge’s “commodity” as he does so: “Centre (gain, which bears the sway in all humane actions) [...] of particular Merchants making their benefit by the general loss of the Kingdome” (Dedicatory). The “well-meaning patriot” (454), as E. A. J. Johnson calls him, finding no just social order in Misselden’s conception of the market, where foreign trade was held to be the centre of the circle of commerce (McNally “Political Economy” 31), Malynes reiterates his beliefs in the regulatory power of the king, expressed through parliament, to maintain commercial order and once again calls for regulation:

The kingdom cannot consume the foreign Commodities imported, but they cause an overbalancing; the Customs and Impositions [...] doth discourage Merchants, which bringeth a distemperature in Trade: [...] For the exchange (which rules Commodities and money) is overruled by other Nations. Let us therefore practise the contrary, to find a full remedy [...] *Missenden’s Ballance* is as necessary as the fifth wheel in a Wagon (134-135).



However, commodity ideologies had definitively evolved: what would be Malynes' life-long defence of the *pro par pari* no longer availed and the Free Traders' theories exercised increasing authority. For example, Thomas Mun's *England's treasure by forraign trade, or, The ballance of our forraign trade is the rule of our treasure*, written between 1626 and 1628 and originally published by his son, John, in 1664, echoes and enlarges upon the theory he shared with Misselden that the crown could not subjectively regulate its currency. Much like his predecessors, Mun continues to defend his arguments with well-worn agrarian examples:

For when the Merchants hath a good dispatch beyond the Seas for his cloth and other Wares, he doth presently return to buy up the greater quantity, which raises the price of our Wools and other Commodities [...] But if our foreign Trade come to a stop [...] the Merchants are impoverished, and thereby the wares of the realm less issued, then do all the said benefits cease (49-50).

Moreover, like the optimistic parable of the sower, the seed of foreign trade will be successful despite the stony ground, allowing merchants and monarchs alike to harvest a large financial yield. All in all, it can be said that early modern mercantilist "theory", or rather rhetoric, which had little to do with scientific or intellectual persuasion, was composed within a pragmatic framework of continuity and change that can be said to have characterised political thinking, as represented in Shakespeare's commodity. Indeed, the language of usury shaped that of exchange, from which, albeit in divergence, was to develop the formulae of contemporaneous exchanges as mediaeval philosophy merged into early modern. It may seem surprising to us today that such elementary terminology managed to shape mercantilist thought. "Commodity" once meant due measure, convenience or opportunity. It now meant useful products, wares or articles of commerce. The idea of trading or dealing hence became an increasingly concrete concept that allowed the doctrine of the balance of domestic payments to expand into that of the Balance of Trade.

If these early modern writers only attempted a partial analysis or ignored some of the inevitable consequences of their theories (Malynes regarded demand as inflexible and exchange rates as inactive, Mun conveniently forgot about the inflationary possibilities of an indefinite influx of silver) and all had vested interests in the theories they supported, it has to be acknowledged that the mercantilist debate exemplifies the local and global market places Shakespeare was writing about for his spectators. We have seen in this chapter how early Modern Bullionists and Balance of Traders used easily recognisable signs (the human body as

a household/nation with a patriarchal figure at its head, the damsel in distress, the dragon, Saint George and well-worn agrarian imagery from the Bible) so their readers could easily grasp the commodity issues at stake and the complex mercantilist ideas they were trying to transmit to them. The earliest writers claimed that the mercantilist transition would be harmful for the general human condition; the later writers stated that it would benefit it. By the time Adam Smith was writing, it no longer even appeared necessary to regulate mercantilism. In the Shakespearean period, however, mercantilism was still an ongoing debate. Shifting commodity metaphors appeared simultaneously at watershed moments of domestic and foreign history (e.g. the Tudor-Stuart succession, the expansion of exploration and colonisation); Shakespeare clearly recognises and adapts to the importance of the evolving commodity symbol in the evolution of contemporary thought. I have just shown divergence between early writers claiming that mercantilism would harm society and later writers who said it would profit it. Shakespeare depicts similar kinds of chaotic intergenerational conflict resulting from a dying feudal culture and a nascent mercantilist society.

- **CHAPTER THREE: NEW GENERATION, NEW COMMODITY, NEW AUTHORITY?**

### **3.1 Introduction**

PAROLES        There's little can be said in't. 'Tis against the rule of nature. To speak on the part of virginity, is to accuse your mothers, which is most infallible disobedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways, out of all sanctified limit, as a desperate offendress against nature. [...] Let me see. Marry, ill, to like him that ne'er it likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with lying; the longer kept the less worth (*All's Well That Ends Well* 1.1.127-143).

Shakespeare wrote five plays which directly map the discussion of parental authority onto discussion of commodity – *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. The word “authority” derives from the Latin word *auctōritāt-* meaning the “power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience”, the “right of ownership, sanction, approval, resolution, advice, right or power to authorize, leadership, authoritativeness” and an “authoritative book or passage of text” (OED “authority” etymology). As such, commodity takes authority’s lead in making the individual essential. Moreover, the evolving characteristics of commodity reveal how younger characters negotiate domestic authority and a correspondence can be made between private and public authority because these plays also firmly establish a relationship between the individual and the nation, since the self metonymically symbolises the state. Finally, that a character called “Paroles”, meaning “words”, discusses commodity in performance in the opening quotation invites consideration of the commodity of the play itself.

In this chapter, I examine how commodity is used in these five plays at the beginning of the action, how it changes, and whether these changes are for the better. The traditional authoritarian values based on commodity and depicted first in the plays are those based on parental, feudal and divinely sanctioned limits. These rigid and largely unjust boundaries are then torn apart by the younger generation characters; it is as if the former sense of measure, fitness or convenience is being replaced by new understandings of profit and gain right in front of the spectators’ eyes. The tight link being made between Paroles’ outline of Helen’s “virginity” as commodity here and the gainful use Helen makes of it should thus be no surprise as the etymological definition of authority is to cause to grow and increase. The self-fashioning thanks to new uses of commodity leads to the loss of parental authority (father, mother or monarch) and to both domestic and political confusion. At the same time, however, the new

order is also authoritarian and irrational. In fact, both forms of commodity are proved to be misused ones and exposed as such in the action, leaving the way open for the spectators to reflect upon their own world view, whether it is just, and whether there is any alternative.

I would like to enlarge on previous research dealing with families (Adelman, Dreher, Neely) and the expression of authority (Keinänen and Salenius, Manninen) in Shakespeare and wonder whether the changing nature of commodity could be a new and significant issue at stake in both key fields. Accordingly, I will first analyse the dissolution of older notions of commodity and a dying social nexus that gives impetus for the plots. Second, I will discuss the dramatic momentum provided by new interpretations, where personal development comes from the profit to be had from easily identifiable cultural symbols: rings, letters or ballads and other saleable items available to even the poorest of English men and women. The evolving issues of the play as commodity are examined last. In fact, if Shakespeare's works can be imagined as transcending "literary precedents and classical authority" (Halsey and Vine 6), this may be in part due to the playwright's astute evaluation of commodity (his plays-as-commodity sold for profit), which embodies this authoritative shift. To make these theatrical evolutions clearer, I will start by examining the early modern family within its changing historical context.

### **3.2 The commodious early modern family**

Helen Berry remarks upon the difficulty of clearly apprehending the early modern family unit because of how historians' subjective personal experience has often clouded their objectivity: "temporal distance from the past has at times lent less of a critical distance than might be thought proper for academic enquiry" ("Family" 2), she notes. Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage, 1500-1800* (1977), for instance, has been criticised for its selective research methods. Focusing on the key milestones of pregnancy and childbirth, infant care, education, marriage and death, he concluded that early modern parents were systematically "indifferent or neglectful" (Bailey "Christian Thought" 210). Revisionist historians, researching within wider social, cultural and economic contexts, have found that even in Shakespeare's time there was in fact much stability in parental affection or at least a "prevalence of various attitudes to children and various child-rearing methods" (Pollock 67). William Gouge, the Puritan rector of Blackfriars, claimed that: "God hath disposed every one's several place [...]. The wife, though a mother of children, is under her husband" (5) and children "are as the goods of their parents, wholly in their power, to be ordered and disposed by them" (422). While this was the official line of thought at the time, it was nevertheless problematic (Amussen "Ordered Society" 196). Besides, as some forty percent of people living in England in 1600

would have been aged under twenty-one and a person's "youth" would have spanned from his or her fourteenth to twenty-eighth birthdays when apprenticeship ended (Sharpe "Disruption" 188), such writings concerned with instilling order and good conduct into the early modern adolescent may have often been little more than wishful thinking. Paternalism in Shakespeare's era was closely involved with parental commodity in the sense that it strongly bears on the desire of the *auctor* (the person wielding power) rather than the more concrete meaning of something that can be exchanged as a tangible good.

Furthermore, parental approval, concerning interests such as higher-ranking marriage contracts, may have been a "deeply desirable commodity" (Adair 179), principally to avoid illegitimate births. Yet historians such as Paul Griffiths (261) and Keith Wrightson (80) underline how early modern offspring most often initiated courtship themselves. What is more, as Susan Amussen points out, the 1540 Statute of Wills had removed nearly all restrictions on distribution of property from fathers to their children ("Gender" 198), thus giving descendants a potential degree of monetary independence as household income could be supplemented by inheritance (Boulton 104). Ian Archer, commenting on one example of early modern bequest, notes how neighbours "proffered advice on the making of the will, often acting as brokers between conflicting interest within the family" (76), further showing that the family unit was not distinct from society but a part of "public life and public order" (Amussen "Gender" 196).

Authority within the early modern family would have thus been affected by a whole host of criteria ranging from occupation, place of residence, social status, income and/or wealth, household management, the church and the state (Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen and Schofield 12). No wonder, as Alexandra Sheppard notes, early modern parenting advice and domestic manuals "agreed that there was no more dangerous age than youth" (23). Furthermore, if Sheppard remarks that handbooks concentrated mainly on the dangers associated with male adolescence (23), in Shakespeare, especially in the five plays under consideration, both male and female children defy their parents. Besides, as well as making use of the early modern commonplace that the family unit was a "little commonwealth" (Amussen "Gender" 200), the plays develop the idea of a world in which children, if they were not of noble birth, had to be "geared for work" (Hindle 18), because they could be a charge to, as well as a commodity for, the household. The increasing association of parental and commodity or cash considerations was a defining factor of early modern society. I would now like to turn and discuss how it is also an important feature in Shakespeare's plays dealing with family relations.

### 3.3 Giving up domestic convenience

A prominent feature of older characters at the beginning of these plays is that they are preparing for death or are mentioned as just having died. Shakespeare's representation of the changes through physical death or ideas of "passing" reveals the evolution of social and cultural order at both the local and global levels. In the first section of the chapter, I will thus examine the plays in their chronological order of creation to investigate how the commodity meaning due measure or convenience jostles with connotations of useful products, wares, articles of commerce or profitable opportunity. Sometimes (*The Comedy of Errors*, *The Winter's Tale*), old ideas of commodity (associated with notions of the family as a well-balanced state) seem to equalise, rather than erase, new ideas of commodity (associated with the free-for-all chaotic world of commerce); at other times (*The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *King Lear*), the commodity is a clearer intergenerational marker. The differences in representation may be because of what we now term as genre: *The Comedy of Errors* is a (knockabout) romantic comedy, *The Winter's Tale* is a Romance, while *The Merchant of Venice* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are more problematic forms of comedy and *King Lear* is a tragedy. To see how such classification can help more clearly perceive semantic changes I would like to start by examining *The Comedy of Errors*.

In *The Comedy of Errors* we perceive a combination rather than a conquering of former meanings of the commodity. This may be because Shakespeare was both acknowledging and adding to his source: the sardonic "New Comedy" written by Plautus, *Menaechmi* (the two Menaechmuses). Apart from the Roman play having a prostitute rather than a wife (Luciana) as a central female character, Paul A. Jorgensen remarks how "[i]n Plautus, the father of the twins dies of grief after the loss of one twin" ("Pelican Shakespeare" 12). Shakespeare's adding importance to the family through Luciana and Egeon is, therefore, a significant softening of the irreverent spirit of his Latin source: the father-figure provides a more serious structure for the farce of mistaken identity concerning his twin children and their servants. Anthony Johnson remarks how the theatre audience and the characters within the play can hence sympathise, intellectually and emotionally, with Egeon and the Pauline theme of forgiveness that he personifies (Personal communication).

At the same time, the play is not only set in a context of familial exchanges but against a background of evolving global competition for trade. More specifically, the bilateral economic war between two ancient Mediterranean cultures, Syracuse in Sicily and Ephesus in Turkey, gives Shakespeare the necessary dramatic tools to stress these developments. The Duke of Syracuse has hanged Ephesian merchants for owing him money ("wanting guilders to redeem

their lives” (1.1.8) and the Duke of Ephesus is going to execute Egeon (an innocent Syracusan merchant) in retaliation. Egeon, a complete invention of Shakespeare’s, since the character is killed off in Plautus, hence serves to at once structure the plot with a stable value system and suggestively reveal how homogenising fiduciary values were encroaching upon familial ones with the risk of “reducing human relations to financial terms” (Johnson Personal communication).

Anthony Johnson notes how Shakespeare’s play recognises, to all the better rework, his sources on the subject of the commodity:

Turning to I.ii in Plautus, we find a passage where Menaechmus (the play’s equivalent of Antipholus of Ephesus) has just left his house with one of his wife’s shawls hidden under his cloak and runs into just the person he wants to meet: his slave, Peniculus. ‘*O mea Commoditas, o mea Opportunitas*’, cries Menaechmus [I.ii.137], greeting his slave as a personification of both the convenient timing (*Commoditas*) and favourable opportunity (*Opportunitas*) of the encounter. Three lines later (Menaechmus having harped on about the fortuitousness of the meeting), Peniculus echoes his master’s words in the assertion that he is adept in timing favourable moments (‘*commoditatis omnis articulos scio*’ [I.ii.137]). What this strongly suggests is that Shakespeare was familiar with at least some of the connotations of *commōditas* in Latin (Personal communication).

Indeed, we know that *commōditas* can mean both due measure, just proportion and symmetry and, in the term’s accusative form, easy, unrestrained, free action. These connotations imply either convenience, ease or (when applied to things) advantage and benefit through the use of dexterity and skill (A Latin Dictionary “*commōditas*”). In Shakespeare “ideas of ‘proportion’, ‘symmetry’, ‘convenience’, ‘advantage’, or ‘fit occasion’, but also (when applied to persons) ‘kindness’” (Johnson Personal communication) are, therefore, juxtaposed with their opposites. In *The Comedy of Errors*, while at the end of the play Egeon is reunited with his “kind”, in the early modern sense of family (OED “kind” etymology), Egeon’s death sentence reveals a lack of “kindness” in that he suffers it simply because he has differing characteristics from people in Ephesus. At the same time, as we shall see later in this chapter, money symbolises the confusion of the two Antipholus brothers in a way that makes them qualitatively equal (i.e one of a kind): the Ephesians mistake the toally confused Antipholus of Syracuse in a market significantly full of commodities : “Some tender money to me; some invite me, / Some other



give me thanks for kindnesses; / Some offer me commodities to buy” (4.3.4-6). As such, while the dramatist employs the knockabout comedy form of mistaken identity throughout, he also questions more profound forms of mistaken identity: “mistaking the true nature of another person and mistaking one’s own nature” (Jorgensen “Pelican Shakespeare” 13). Exteriors can only be trustworthy if they represent one’s true intrinsic nature; if not, they are a form of representation, or subjectification (Drakakis Personal communication); even “authoritative” figures can be seen as purposeless puppets on stage.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio, who seems an older father figure to his friend Bassanio, longs for an end to life. As the metaphor “I am the tainted wether of the flock / and meetest for death” (4.1.114-115) also implies, he is characterised by Shakespeare as passive (a “wether” is a castrated ram) and his financial operations are revealed to be systematically sterile; Antonio is powerless as “both as a man and a merchant adventurer” (Berry “Antonio” 129). At the same time, Bassanio, Antonio’s surrogate child, shrewdly exploits Antonio’s fatherly generosity (through the 3,000-ducat loan to go to Belmont and court the wealthy Portia as he has used up his own inheritance (Keinänen Personal communication)), even though Antonio has in fact “no money nor commodity” (1.1.177) with which to be munificent. From the outset, youth apparently influences conceptions of authority and does so through the prism of commodity. In *The Merchant of Venice*, an example is the passage reported by the character of Solanio after Shylock seems to have lost everything, his money and his daughter, Jessica, in favour of Lorenzo, a Christian. Jessica has empowered herself in betrayal of her father’s person and his values:

SOLANIO      I never heard a passion so confused [...] As the dog Jew did utter in the streets. ‘My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! Justice! The law! My ducats, and my daughter! A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats, Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter! And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones, Stolen by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl; She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats’ (*The Merchant of Venice* 2.8.12-22).

Katherine Eisaman Maus has shown that Shakespeare uses reported speech to allow for a double interpretation; after all, it “is impossible to know how accurate this rumour might be: the equation of ducats and daughter is exactly what Christians expect of Shylock, when Shylock finally appears on stage, he says nothing of the kind” (“Norton Shakespeare” 1116). Solanio’s

is a callous attempt to belittle Shylock (Jessica's depriving her father of his ducats, and making off with his "two stones", or capacity for both financial and physical reproduction). While it appears that the "emasculatation" results in Shylock's wish to relinquish his parental authority; the immediate consequence would be not his own death but that of his daughter: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear; would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!" (3.1.74-76). Shylock should love his children more than his money but he is at odds with the prevailing system; his desire overturns the natural order of society viewed in terms of a family where children are subservient to their parents but are also "economically dependent and had to be provided for" (Pollock 98). In *The Merchant of Venice* power is essentially patriarchal because of the conspicuous absence of mothers for either Jessica or Bassanio, yet the younger characters exemplify the incongruity of paternal authority through their manoeuvring. This impression is reinforced in the other plays under study, where older generation characters abandon their responsibilities, leaving the way open for new order commodity manipulation. The younger generation can thus wield authority in the sense of manipulating "something likened to a commodity [in that it is] desirable, valuable or useful" (OED "commodity" n. 3 c) for personal profit. I will start by examining these crucial issues in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Lear*.

### **3.4 Disrupting public expedience**

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, as the Countess remarks, young generation talents can be "virtues and traitors too" (1.1.39). Here, Helen (the orphaned daughter of Gerard de Narbonne, a doctor) is the Countess's ward just as Bertram (the Countess's son and Helen's future husband) is the ailing French King's. The basis for authority in the play should be political, paternal as well as patriarchal, as the King and his adoptive heir are male characters. Yet, the king is dying (1.2.74) and, while matriarchy is prominent through the staged presence of the Countess as a mother for both of the younger characters, maternal authority reveals itself to be just as superficial. The play's eighteen instances of the term "eye" and Helen's reference to "imagination": "My imagination / Carries no favour in't but Bertram's / I am undone. There is no living, none / If Bertram be away" (1.1.77-80) suggest how spectators should be wary of appearances. Moreover, as the Countess repeats the term "mother" twelve times in the same scene in which she induces passion, eight of which in the space of only twelve lines (1.3.124-136), she seems even to linguistically colour Helen's own sense of commodiousness to the extent that the younger character refuses to become Bertram's sister and decides to become a "mother" in her own right.

In fact, this desire empowers Helen with a vigour that enables her to overturn authority, manipulate her “parents” and use the commodity of her virginity to assume control over her husband despite her officially inferior position as a poor ward and a woman. Patriarchal command is first notably weakened through the presence of the mother figure of the Countess and further undermined thanks to Helen’s use of commodity: she cures the king but only in exchange for an enforced marriage contract with Bertram. From there on, she makes a mockery of manhood despite Bertram’s attempting to avoid a match imposed beneath his rank (he refuses to consummate the marriage and arranges to desert his wife with the money he was given as a dowry (Ranald 80)). Moreover, with her pursuit of her husband, Shakespeare completely reverses the masculine quest-romance pattern in that Helen makes Bertram her male “marital prize” (Maus “Norton Shakespeare” 2193).

More importantly still, because *All’s Well That Ends Well* features a father figure who is also the King of France, the loss of control in the private sphere is associated with changing power relations within the sphere of the state; as Margaret Ranald observes, Helen is granted a title “to ratify her undoubted virtue and thus make her more than equal to her recalcitrant bridegroom” (80). Authority is not arbitrary; it is Helen’s tangible and profitable cure that prompts the king to exercise enforced control over Bertram, even threatening to disinherit his own ward (2.3) if he refuses to consent to the marriage with the Countess’s charge. The King can only seemingly do as he pleases because he has been saved from his demise by Helen. From then on, he is no longer the only source of power in his kingdom; it is Helen who effectively wields absolute power thanks to her skilful expediency. Old generation control is seen to completely give way to commodity, which is used by a young generation orphaned woman from a lower-class background who manipulates the other higher-ranking characters. Finally, the changing nature of commodity in the play is both local (the cure affects the King’s power-making at home) and global (Helen goes to Italy to fetch her husband when he attempts to disobey her and uses the commodity of her virginity through the “bed trick” in Act 4 to bring him home). Power relations are shown to be disrupted within the family structure: between father and daughter, husband and wife but also within the hierarchy of the state and abroad because both are closely connected in the play. While Helen should be subservient to her elders and spouse (she refers to herself as “servant” twice [1.3.142, 2.5.68]), she is empowered by her efficient use of the cure and destabilises both the patriarchal family unit and the framework of the whole country.

Patriarchy also dissolves in *King Lear* on private and public levels because the king relinquishes not only his political power but also his “material resources” (Manninen 11)

through the division of his kingdom in the first scene of the play. Wally Seccombe notes how even in peasant families pre-mortem property transfer was prevalent in medieval and early modern Europe but that it “is one thing to start the devolutionary process and quite another to complete it, surrendering househeadship” (101). At the same time, Lear seems to favour what Jean Louis Flandrin calls a peasant “household spirit” (79), by setting up the love test (1.1) to bequeath his inheritance mainly to his most dutiful daughter (whom he hopes will be Cordelia), whereas he should prefer the more noble lineal system concerning inheritance among heirs. The very formal tone of the first scene seemingly gives authenticity to the decision of Lear to divide his kingdom. The spectators get the impression that Lear’s donation could be a very generous and rightful choice on the part of an *auctor* because much of the first scene is in prose to imply plain speaking and truth. But there is also a tyrannical side to his generosity. He wants to favour his youngest daughter and in so doing ignores the (early modern) rules governing inheritance, where if there is no male heir and “he that dieth had no sons but daughters the land is equally divided amongst them” (Smith “Commonwealth” 247). Because he is also abdicating as king, it appears that he does not respect the duties that are incumbent upon him as monarch and confuses the two roles of father and regent whilst counting on retaining this children’s respect, his hundred knights and enjoying the end of his life on earth.

Once he has surrendered “convenient access” (OED “commodity” n. 4 b) to his kingship, however, his property as a father is also affected and even private interest can be overruled by his daughters, when they deprive him of his retinue (1.4 and 2.4) and leave him destitute, even as a father. The transfer of commodity from father to daughters thus exposes how “royalty, paternity, experience and gender all fail to ensure the respect of the younger generation” (Manninen 16). Depending on how we view the story, we can say, on one hand, that the old order is an uncontested natural one with an authority that is based on universally held principles of feudality, heritage and kingship and is validated by an ultimate divine authority. On the other hand, we can see former authority as tyrannical and oppressive, leaving no possibility for any viewpoint different from that of the king, who, from the first, is seen to behave in a random and despotic manner. The monarch’s great age and status leave no option open at first but to respect his decisions and pander to his whims, despite everyone being aware of his weaknesses as a man and as an authoritative figurehead. Gradually though, Shakespeare represents the transition from an old order to a new one and from old forms of commodity to new ones. To point to the evolution there is the artificiality of the flattery contest between Lear’s two eldest daughters in their ambition to gain power. Cordelia’s “nothing” (1.1.85) is then a reminder to her father that he return to his kingly duties and also an attempt to make him see

through the flattery. The message is that if we cannot see clearly then we should not be allowed to rule. The court and government are not a stage, so flattery and role-play lead to perversion and hypocrisy.

“Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth” (“Kings are justly called Gods” para. 2, 44) James I would say to his court in 1609. If Lear’s authority is based upon a similar basis to that of James, then God is seen to be a very unjust one. In the early modern period, God was seen by many as hidden and mysterious so there was no point searching for the grounds of His decisions. God was not necessarily in concordance with human happiness but his decisions were not to be questioned, even if they were tyrannical. From Cordelia’s refusal to flatter him, the old king, like a Jamesian god, thus starts behaving as a tyrant. Instead of realising that his daughter’s disobedience is a clue to his mistake, he punishes her. In the introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play, Foakes notes how “it is interesting that in a play staged before James I four characters are prominent for their disobedience [including] Cordelia, who has ‘obedience scanted’ [1.1.266]” (71) However, as we have seen, hers has been an act not of disloyalty but of “virtuous disobedience” (Strier 111); Cordelia is reminding Lear of the pre-Reformation compassionate God and perhaps this was also a reminder to James, before whom the play was performed, to think about how he wielded power. Goneril, on the other hand, declares that Lear is: “Dearer than eyesight” (1.1.54) to point to Calvinist ideas as of material happiness through commodity. Criticising new forms of commodity seems important. If Lear had done so, his country and family would not have been torn apart in such a chaotic manner.

However, Lear’s hubris blinds him to the fact that he is making a mistake. As well as misreading others’ natures Lear is divesting himself of what makes others obey him. He is to lose all credibility because he will no longer have the commodity to enforce his commands and even Cordelia is rejected because she refuses to take any part in this courtly flattery. Moreover, Lear no longer has any time for troublesome court business but is still intent on keeping up regal and paternal appearances. From this starting point as a king and father divesting himself of all substance, the audience is presented with the sorry decline of both. Had he not been a king, Lear’s desire to crawl unburdened to the “nothing” from which he considers he came would finally not have been that shocking. However, such a lack of understanding coming from a monarch, who allows his children, in a decision based on his own interests, to scramble for his kingdom in such an undignified manner would have been doubly poignant for spectators who were living in the aftermath of the Tudor power struggle and the ensuing coronation of James I. The audience is asked both to question passing from one type of authority to another

and what rules and regulations are inherent to each type of command. As Lear becomes more of a man and less of an abstract figurehead, he realises that archaic principles and unbending authority are unworkable but it is too late because he has given over his authority to a new order.

“This child-changed father!” (4.6.14) bemoans Cordelia upon her return from France to rescue the father who has banished her three acts earlier. And indeed, we can say that Lear has been changed to a child because he has been divested of his authority. In dividing his kingdom, he has handed over regal and parental authority to his sons-in-law and daughters and the commodity that he thought would liberate him has in fact shut him up into the role of a helpless child. If his three daughters take on the role of his mother, then the two eldest have been both devious and flattering in order to obtain the kingdom. It is not surprising that Lear is overtaken by what was known as the “mother”, or hysteria, after his rejection by Regan (2.2), after having already been sent away by Goneril (1.3). He states: “O me, my heart, my rising heart! But down!” (2.2.219), yet the problem is that he can no longer suppress the mother, both in a metaphorical and literal sense, because he no longer has the authority to do so. Along with his country, he has paradoxically become stifled by a gift of commodity that was designed to free them both. We see how Lear’s squabble with his daughters embodies the contradiction: his youngest stands obstinately up to him, just as he has stubbornly refused to listen to her; the two eldest are only too keen to take revenge once they have obtained power. The chaos is figured through images of disease. Metaphors of cannibalism and tainted blood conjure up this idea in the play; Lear calls Regan “a disease that’s in my flesh / Which I must needs call mine” (2.2.387-388). As Lear devoured his children’s identities, his eldest daughters try to stifle him at the first chance.

The ideal woman of the time was especially subservient to male authority, so these portraits of the two elder sisters as authoritative figures would have all the more shocked Jacobean audiences. Goneril as Lear’s primogeniture may have expected to inherit the entire kingdom. In fact, her half of Lear’s donation goes to her husband Albany as a dowry and she is thus twice thwarted in her ambition to become monarch and ruling authority. Added to this, she has a “mild” (4.2.1) and “milk-livered” (4.2.31) husband, whom she probably had to marry for political reasons and who still professes allegiance to the old order. This may go to explain Goneril’s bullying of Albany, who will never be a match for her. Regan, however, has a husband, Cornwall, equally violent as herself so she acts in a masculine manner to equal him. In the scene where Gloucester’s eyes are plucked out (3.7), it is she who encourages Cornwall to pull out the second eye (3.7.78). Like the daughters’ frustrations, Gloucester’s son Edmund’s



bastardy explains his ambition. The children's assertiveness, whether male or female, transgresses the traditional limits of authority.

The Duke of Gloucester subplot, involving a father disinheriting his legally entitled son, Edgar, in favour of the Duke's bastard, Edmund, serves as a foil to the problem of "rulership from the point of view of its possession by women" (Manninen 16). Gloucester's problem is also expressed in terms of old generation forms of commodity (mis)conception: Edmund fabricates Edgar's treason (1.6) and the Duke relinquishes both paternal and patriarchal power to the son who has usurped the place of the lawful heir. Gloucester is seen to be ruled by his son from the moment that he misinterprets the letter Edmund (2.1) reads to him (just as Lear misinterprets the flattery of his daughters), and Gloucester condemns Edgar just as unfairly as Lear condemns Cordelia. William Elton says that Goneril, Regan and Edmund thus fall into the category of Machiavellian hypocrites or "inward" atheists who mock religion and compassion in contrast to the "outward" atheist, who freely expresses his opinion (55). We see this especially when Edmund says to Goneril: "Yours in the ranks of death" (4.2.25) implying that they are together a legion of death and destruction. As Edmund rejects mercy he must rely on fortune: "Briefness and fortune, work!" (2.1.18), he claims. While the younger characters rise to power quickly, their fall is just as quick. This is symbolised by Shakespeare using the easily recognisable image of a turning wheel: "The wheel is come full circle, I am here" (5.3.164) says Edmund as the wheel of fortune upon which he relies turns around to crush him. By recognising the greater authority of commodity idolatry, he has defied the heavens with no other standard of behaviour than the pleasure it brings; he mirrors and distorts the behaviour of both Lear, and Gloucester, according to whom "there was good sport at his [Edmund's] making" (1.1.20). The younger strengths hence still favour having a good time like their fathers but do not have the patience to wait for the occasion to do so. Shakespeare may be implying that authority is something that has to be worked at or learnt within the social nexus of humanity rather than something to be had by flattery or Machiavellian manoeuvring as if it were a simple commodity.

Furthermore, Gloucester's belated recognition, couched in terms of "commodities", catalyses the possible realisation of the new commodity scam. The still-recognisable former sense of commodity as in "use or value to mankind" (OED "commodity" n. 3 a), jostles with the later sense of trading and dealing to show how the young generation have undermined their elders' authority rather than consolidating it: they have stepped beyond the hierarchical threshold of identity dependent on their parents into a world where self-construction can be achieved at all levels through exchange:



GLOUCESTER I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;  
 I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen  
 Our means secure us, and our mere defects  
 Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,  
 The food of thy abused father's wrath!  
 Might I but live to see thee in my touch,  
 I'd say I had eyes again (*King Lear* 4.1.19-24)!

Gloucester's mistake, as Lear's, was that he could not see that public political power was itself governed by parental commodity. Kenneth Burke calls Lear's relinquishing of power a "paradox of substance" (xx), for what is a king without a kingdom, a Duke without his dukedom, that is, a patriarch without his property regardless of the gender of the inheritors? Here, Gloucester's avowal of his failing to perceive the new nature of commodity through the vocabulary of sight ("stumble", "abused", "might I but live to see") renders more obvious the inconsistency. *King Lear* here deals overtly with the consequences of diminishing social life and the values that hold it together; the above passage involving "commodities" clearly points to the loss of household government and an emerging chaotic mercantilist culture central to this thesis. Moreover, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare shows how without children, the patriarch cannot transmit a sense of authority at all. This point is made in a spectacular manner in this last play of the group under study in this section, since King Leontes is seen to lose, not just a son, but his entire family during the course of the play.

### **3.5 Disintegration of matrimonial interest**

If Leontes, the king of Sicily, in *The Winter's Tale*, is not preparing his own demise, he certainly contributes to the death of his marriage, sacrifices the life of his son Mamilius (3.2.141-143) and nearly kills his heavily pregnant wife, Hermione. He does so by imagining adultery (1.2) and trying his wife in court (3.2) for treasonous sexual license with the King of Bohemia, Polixenes, who has been, suspiciously for Leontes, a guest at the Sicilian court for the past nine months (1.2.1-2). When Hermione defiantly proclaims during her trial, just fifty lines before the news of her own son's off-stage death, that life can be "no commodity" (3.2.91), she is thus making a powerful statement showing how Leontes' privilege of "private and selfish interest" (OED "commodity" n. 2 a) has brought a cash nexus conception of society into the Sicilian state. This is the meaning of his friendship contest with Polixenes that he initially uses

in an attempt to persuade the latter to stay a week longer in court (1.2.16). Leontes makes the mistake of exchanging one commodity, his wife, in favour of another, his friend, when he summons Hermione to persuade Polixenes to stay in his place: “Tongue-tied our queen? Speak you” (1.2.28), he orders.

He thinks he can safely cede the power of words to his wife to retain his friend but loses the social nexus of kinship and kingship as he does so. When Hermione is empowered by Leontes to speak she succeeds where her husband has failed in convincing Polixenes to stay; it is as if Leontes loses vocal recognition as a spouse and a sovereign. He sees the sexual licentiousness of his wife and friend as the only possible plausible explanation for her victory, leading to a perversion of all kinds of relationships (husband and wife, father and child, king and state). Hermione’s oral success signals the audible disintegration of former paradigms from then on. Leontes’ language translates the confusion; Shakespeare’s choice to have Leontes speak incoherently is difficult to justify unless the distorted language is designed to signify the disintegration of former forms of authority:

LEONTES        But not for joy, for joy. This entertainment  
                    May a free face put on, derive a liberty  
                    From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,  
                    And well become the agent – ’t may, I grant  
                    But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers  
                    As now they are, and making practised smiles  
                    As in a looking glass (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.110-116).

There can be no communication between character and audience because the king is caught in the trope of the “looking glass”, where he sees Polixenes as his lascivious other; as John Pitcher points out, that “kings [may be] twin manifestations of one identity can be truly disturbing” (“Arden Shakespeare” 116). The visual reflection of the disintegration of Leontes’ private commodity is rapidly transformed into the verbal expression of state disorder, to whose duties Polixenes must remind the king by speaking of his own son, Florizel, in terms that evoke both the affairs of family (“my matter”) and of court (“soldier”, “statesman”) before he nevertheless flees home to Bohemia (1.2.462), leaving Hermione to deal with her jealous husband: “He’s all my exercise, my mirth, my matter; / Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy; / My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all” (1.2.167-169). Leontes’ son and heir, Mamilius, who should stimulate resilience to chaos, weakens it; Leontes questions filiation: “Art thou my boy?”

(1.2.117) or speaks at, rather than to, his son: “They say it is a copy out of mine” (1.2.121). Shakespeare’s choice of using the third person plural and singular vocally emphasises the detachment between the king and his heir, and “boy” is also substituted by the pronoun “it” (1.2.121) to represent collapsing command and declining former notions of authority. The degraded power of the king is shown by how useless language is when it wields no continuing influence. In due course Leontes is disowned as a husband and a father; as the play is a Romance, he will keep his kingdom, but Shakespeare shows that a partial family reunion is only possible because Leontes adapts to new forms of commodity.

In *The Winter’s Tale*, as in all of the plays under consideration here, old generation preparation and acceptance of personal, political, marital or patriarchal passing signals the disintegration of former understandings of commodity. Furthermore, the parent characters’ cornerstone position in society is represented as weakened by signs of visible or audible collapse (imprisonment, confiscation, stifling, blinding or language distortion and disintegration). At times the replacement is chaos, at others, instead of complete desolation, there is a redefinition of influence through new forms of commodity in that Shakespeare shows how old words can be spoken differently. The more modern use of the term registers a watershed moment and signals a transition from traditional to new generation combinations of authority and power. The evolution represents what Virginia Woolf calls Shakespeare’s combining old words in “a new order”, which she also questions: “How can we combine old words in new orders so they survive, create beauty, so that they tell the truth?” (95), she asks. When analysing the disappearance of one commodity in favour of another in the plays we see how Shakespeare seems to provide the answer by successfully doing justice to the complexity of an early modern creation of new meanings and young generation truths that contribute to and develop understanding of the term. At first glance, the old and new meanings do not appear to belong to each other, but in the second part of this chapter I will demonstrate how novel significations are combined with the older ones, how Shakespeare reinvigorates the idea of “commodity” in a mercantilist rather than a social sense. In this way, commodity can be represented in new contexts and take on new meanings. As before, I use the same chronological order of the plays for my demonstration.

### **3.6 Towards a more modern household**

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE    There’s not a man I meet but doth salute me  
    As if I were their well-acquainted friend;  
    And every one doth call me by my name.

Some tender money to me; some invite me,  
Some other give me thanks for kindnesses;  
Some offer me commodities to buy:  
Even now a tailor called me in his shop  
And showed me silks that he had bought for me,  
And therewithal took measure of my body (*The Comedy of Errors* 4.3.1-9).

In *The Comedy of Errors*, the dissolution of old order commodity provokes nothing but generalised confusion; Egeon's imminent demise and lack of control over his own destiny, seeming to signal the end of one order, heralds the farce of mistaken identity involving his children and servants. Shakespeare's decision to blur the boundaries between the profits of trade and interpersonal relations ("some tender money to me [...] some invite me") and the nature of the altruistic and the mercantile ("kindnesses [...] commodities") redefines commodity on an innovative basis but not without a certain amount of confusion. The new perception is fully expressed by Antipholus of Syracuse as he wanders through the commodity-stacked streets of Ephesus in search of his twin. Through the simultaneous awe and anguish that the sense of abundance creates, the playgoer is focussed upon the amazing multitude of objects providing a concomitant route of discovery that culminate in the family reunion at the end of the plot.

In the above passage and through the repetition of quantity ("some"), the audience is reminded of the desires of both Egeon and Antipholus: an attempt to recreate their family. The use of the words "some" and "and" at the beginning of the lines convey similar signals of accumulation that can be assessed as signs of echo or, alternatively, of recreation. The aural and visual image of the "o" vowel creates a similar regenerative effect throughout the passage, creating a new conception of commodity: Shakespeare's use of "money", "other", "offer", "now", "shop", "show", "bought", "body", despite the fact that the vowels do not all assonate, nonetheless creates a connection, through the text, but also through the "show" of the "body" (of what would inevitably be a younger actor than the one playing Egeon), of new ideas of commodity embodied in the actor emphasising the sounds. Similarly, the alliteration of "s" in "salute" and "silks", or "sh" in "show" and "shop", helps along the speaker's words and line of thought towards new understandings, whereas the unvoiced stop consonants "k" and "t" in "meet", "salute", "acquainted", "tender", "thanks", "invite", "kindnesses", "commodities", "tailor", "took", or the voiced plosive "b" in "bought" or "body" convey both the energy and passion and the shock and surprises of the birth of these new meanings. Finally, because the

quest for the character's twin brother, Antipholus of Ephesus, is set against a theatrical backdrop of an extraordinary consumer society, he is placed in an analogous position to that of a rare or exotic good. As such, he is sought after like a compellingly attractive or precious commodity in a foreign market place. Commodity is thus presented as something that can simultaneously be a source of stress and re-creation.

Such a concept would have been itself, as we have seen, the product of the period generally called the Age of Exploration. This was an age during which merchant adventuring shareholding societies circumnavigated the world in search of profit under the guise of the defense of national interests. In the English aftermath of the Reformation, because of an increasingly centralised state and the concentration of authority in the person of the monarch rather than the Pope – and especially because of a need for supply and sustenance of the royal treasury to provide for the future possibility of war against Catholic opponents – a state-approved looting and seizure of foreign goods began to emerge. Economic nationalism became synonymous with individualism and more tangible profit-seeking with the social prestige and wealth to be had won essentially by state commissioned privateers such as Francis Drake, who was regarded as a national hero, knighted, appointed to high offices (mayor of Plymouth, vice-admiral), all for feats such as plundering his way around the globe (1577-1580) and the “singeing the king of Spain's beard” by burning 10,000 tonnes of the Spanish monarch's shipping in Cadiz, in 1587. Apart from the glory to be had from Drake's privateering, J.M. Keynes notes how Drake's activity was also very profitable, since the boom period in England seemed to begin with the return of the sailor's first important expedition (his third voyage) in 1573, and was confirmed by the immense gains of his second expedition, which returned to England in 1580. Thus, Keynes remarks how:

Indeed, the booty brought back by Drake in the *Golden Hind* [variously estimated by historians to have been anything from £300,000 to £1,500,000] may fairly be considered the fountain and origin of foreign investment. Elizabeth paid out of the proceeds the whole of her foreign debt and invested a part of the balance (about £42,000) in the Levant Company; largely out of the profits of the Levant Company there was formed the East India Company, the profits of which during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the main foundations of England's foreign connections [and] the increment of the country's wealth (155-56).

The idea that power was intrinsic to the desires of the person of the monarch was giving way to an appreciation of kingly status that depended on a mercantilist sense of commodity; indeed, Keynes also notes the simultaneous hardship of the agricultural population (158), with prices rising, among other reasons, due to the increased supply of gold and silver that decreased the rule of custom in business (Knights 36) and outstripped rents and wages; hence, the process that provided profitable opportunity and capital for the monarch deprived the monarch's subjects of a large part of their incomes and lowered their standards of living. From this standpoint, new generation mercantilism had become acceptable even to the crown, even if this meant no regard for the common people.

One of the key points concerning commodity in *The Comedy of Errors* thus seems to be a shift from the idea of a natural order, where authority runs from top to bottom and from father to child, to a mercantilist system, which threatens to overturn this "natural" order. Commodity embodied in Shakespeare's children characters creates an exciting new order but also the possibility of chaos; the shift can be viewed as an opposition to the principle of the doctrine of correspondence that John Hayward (c. 1564-1627), the Elizabethan historian, lawyer and political thinker frames as follows: "The whole world is nothing but a great state, the state is no other than a great family, and the family is no other than a great body", with the state "governed by one commander" (B4). If we choose to ignore that Tudor and Stuart monarchs were themselves involved in the creation of chaos, through their patronage of global trade and colonisation, we fail to consider the multitudinous significations of Shakespeare's representation of commodity. *The Comedy of Errors* provides an early example of a process that Shakespeare develops in later plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, to which I will turn next.

In the same vein as Antipholus of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors*, the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* can be interpreted as both a victim of her father's will and highly empowered, especially as she not only manipulates her father's last wishes but also Bassanio's choice of the casket (2.7) so as to give her future husband the illusion of agency. Moreover, Portia manipulates the commodity of her wedding ring to exercise power over her husband; as Gail Kern Paster observes, it is Portia "who physically withholds herself from Bassanio pending the outcome of the trial in Venice even though she provisionally binds herself to him and bestows her ring upon him" (93). Portia's attitude reveals how she has successfully separated notions of old generation authority and power, thanks to more tangible commodities, with which she plays the "groom's role" (Dreher 133), either by leading her future husband to the correct answer in the casket test or pledging fidelity through the tangible commodity of the

wedding ring that was “generally regarded as a lawful form of demonstrating sentiment at spousals, and of expressing the continuance of mutual consent” (O’Hara 65). Superstitions particularly surrounded the ring: the ostensible control imposed by its circularity gave it authoritative emblematic content, which could have been recognised by audiences.

Admittedly, although Portia resists patriarchal domination, she can also be seen as at times supporting the old generation Christian dogma of the natural order. Robert F. Darcy remarks upon how her “name registers the degree to which she serves as a port, or portal – literally the means of entry to wealthy woman’s dowry” (197), which could have given weight not only to the idea of commodified women but of how Portia’s father successfully exercises control over her until her husband presents himself to possess her; this is what Darcy calls “a closed arrangement, a [...] hoarding and withholding of the daughter” (172). From this point of view, Portia supports early modern ideals of children’s submission to their fathers. Portia also seems to express deference to male characters by ostensibly visiting roadside shrines, kneeling and praying for “happy wedlock hours” (5.1.33). Yet, as with the account of Shylock’s disarray concerning the disappearance of his daughter, Portia’s acts are only reported, by Stefano, and spectators never actually see her behaving in this way on stage to give credit to the hearsay; in fact, her behaviour contradicts this report. Although it is claimed that Portia enacts a patriarchal regulated and sanctioned situation, she shows herself, as Corrin S. Abate puts it, to embody “the economic viability of Antonio, so Bassanio will now turn to her for any future assistance as he once did to his male friends” (291). We can thus understand how Portia retains total independence, as her submission is only a costume that she “wears as gracefully as her disguise” (Dusinberre 85); while “Portia’s father’s will, through the mottoes, criticises rather than endorses commercial values” (Newman “Ring” 19), she achieves the disruption of patriarchal authority thanks to the disintegration of old concepts and the changing nature of commodity.

As in *The Comedy of Errors*, we do injustice to Shakespeare’s creativity if we fail to account for Portia’s ability to manipulate earlier types of authority, resist submission to her father or husband and inscribe her own control. Portia’s father is already dead and, if he seems to have kept control over his daughter through the will stipulating that she have no choice of husband (1.2.19), the symbolic separation of his person into the three caskets affords Portia the possibility of empowerment that by division he had intended to prevent. By his otherworldly partition, Portia’s father undermines the ultimate patriarchal cornerstone of early modern social unity: God, unto whom even the king had to submit himself (Gouge 5). Despite her apparent lack of choice, Portia manipulates power because her father, by changing his desires into tangible gold, silver and lead caskets (3.2), hence changes the very nature of parental control.



Likewise, in the other plays I analyse within this section, the evolution in commodity can be individual or, even more significantly, take on national, international or even metaphysical proportions.

### **3.7 Innovative elements of national wealth**

The issue of the ring as a commodified symbol of the matrimonial pledge of fidelity is treated from an even wider perspective by Shakespeare in *All's Well That Ends Well*, where Bertram's ring can be viewed as having the effect of empowering the lower status Helen rather than her aristocratic husband. G. K. Hunter significantly notes, for instance, how Bertram flippantly exchanges his family ring – the symbol of centuries of generations of French nobility – for Diana's virginity ("The Arden Shakespeare" xxviii); unbeknownst to the commodity credulous Bertram, however, Helen will exchange herself for Diana and the ring thus becomes a representation of how young generation characters can transcend old order domination, whatever their status. In the former framework, the ring effectively manifests command; within the new order, however, the ring becomes a tangible device that accords power to those who are able to manipulate it most efficiently. Bertram's mistake is to act like his forefathers; he believes that command has been handed down to him, like the ring, and that he will still be in control simply because of filiation, with or without the status symbol. He does not realise that within the new framework, the control associated with commodity no longer implies conforming to the desires of influential people but can be exchanged from hand to hand, by anyone, like merchandise. Moreover, Shakespeare's choice to have a foolish younger character attempt to embody old generation values is consistent with a view of the traditional natural order as one that was becoming outdated and even irrational by the time of writing. Helen accordingly acquires the power associated with the new order and the ring becomes the manifestation of how power literally changes hands during the play.

Furthermore, the choice of the ring as a plot device in *All's Well that Ends Well* brings to mind other plays created at approximately the same time and where the giving and receiving of rings within the theatre signifies evolution of commodity's meaning. John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605), George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston's *Eastward Ho* (1605) or Thomas Dekker and John Webster's *Westward Ho* (circa 1604) and *Northward Ho* (1605) all use the ring as a sign of new forms of societal interaction: rings are represented within a mercantile context to reveal their use as cash symbols rather than symbols of love in betrothal. Audiences probably expected as much; Eric Partridge notes how the ring is a "shape metaphor", represented as a magic and "physiologically inaccurate" circular "pudenda", and is given

various negative meanings. In *Hamlet* it is conflated with no longer circulating currency in reference to an actor playing a woman's part: "'Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not crackt within the ring'". In *Troilus and Cressida* it is related to venereal disease through Thersites and makes reference to serpigo, "commonly known as 'ring-worm'". The pudenda-synonymy continues in *Cymbeline* through "Iachimo to Posthumous, in reference to the latter's virtuous wife and his much-prized finger-ring, 'you may wear her in title yours: but, you know, strange fowl light upon neighbouring ponds. Your ring may be stolen too'" ("Bawdy" 27, 45, 99, 234, 250). Rather than a love token in betrothal, the ring had thus become a symbol of wage labour and moneyed sex.

The symbolic exchange value of rings in City Comedies, especially in light of some of Shakespeare's uses of it, clearly complicates the folklore interpretation such as that recognised by W. W. Lawrence concerning *All's Well That Ends Well*. He identifies two traditional episodes of (1) "the healing of the king" and (2) "the fulfilment of the tasks" as sufficient evidence for a Manichean tale of good and evil, where "Shakespeare's aim was to tell, in theatrically effective fashion, the story of a noble woman passing through great afflictions into happiness" (38). George W. Hunter, while disagreeing with the second of Lawrence's assumptions, also stresses Helen's gentlewomanly nature through an abandonment of "worldly position" evidenced by her journey to Great St Jacques (via Florence) being unequivocally one of "contrition and abnegation" (xxx). A careful appraisal of the ring as symbol and catalyst in the play, especially when its use is compared to that of a sample of the City Comedies reveals it rather to be a narrative of intergenerational and cross-gendered mercantilism that evolves in a move from the world of fairy-tale into that of the market place. The City Comedies put into perspective Shakespeare's work as they show how society was reorganising rapidly: through their dynamic representations of complicated and ingenious social happenings in Jacobean London and their assumption that social advancement through acquisition was a major preoccupation of the citizen class.

One of Shakespeare's chief concerns in *All's Well* seems to be to experiment with or parody the ring and its notions of fantasy and possibilities for elevating status from the street level thanks to profitable commodity exchange; symbolic value is created by Helen's "commodity", or virginity, that is profitably exchanged for the visually recognisable token of the ring that allows her to rise in society. Elsewhere, Marston was eager to exploit the trope of the ring-as-commodity; indeed, in *The Dutch Courtesan*, the ring defines both the chaste character of Beatrice and the relationship with her fiancé, the pleasure-loving Freevill, who is also involved with a courtesan, Francheschina. Catherine Richardson notes how the theatrical

relations between all three characters in Marston's play are negotiated thanks to the ring's "capacity as a token" (para. 12): she remarks how the ring given to Freevill by Beatrice is at once a symbol of her love to subdue his passion in the balcony scene: "I give you faith; and prithee, / Since, poor soul, I am so easy to believe thee, / Make it much more pity to deceive me. / Wear this slight favour in my remembrance [*Throweth down a ring to him*]" (2.1.53-56) and has a significantly different value for the betrothed youth and his prostitute later in the play:

FRANCHESCHINA	[ <i>Seeing and grasping a ring on Frevill's finger</i> ] Prithee now, 'tis but a toy, a very trifle.
FREEVILL	I care not for the value, Frank, but i' faith
FRANCHESCHINA	I' faith, we must needs have it ( <i>The Dutch Courtesan</i> 2.2.72-74).

The ring formerly held use value as a symbolic token of the love between Beatrice and Freevill but it now draws attention to the exchange value of commodities in a market of interpersonal relationships. Richardson notes how "Marston uses the stability of the object" (para. 15) to depict the instability of the commodified associations that it signifies throughout the play. Similarly, in *All's Well*, it is her husband's ring, the visual symbol of a feudal understanding of commodity, that Helen produces to reveal explicitly mercantile concepts of the exchange of her body for the Italian Diana in her aristocratic French husband's bed.

The interconnection between the French and Italian scenes in the play presents a picture of new concepts of commodity going beyond household borders into the state or even global arena. In the new cash nexus framework Helen fights for Bertram, he capitulates; Helen is an orphaned descendant of a lowly doctor and a subservient female and yet she is also an assertive soldier, seeking authority over Bertram through the restoration to health of an ailing king and from there on subverting the traditional early modern concept of inter-generational authority as well as ideas of female agency. The witty banter between Helen and Paroles around the perception of Helen's virginity as commodity perhaps best expresses this strategy of significances relating to legitimacy, influence and control:

HELEN	Not my virginity yet [...] There shall your master have a thousand loves, A mother and a mistress and a friend, A phoenix, captain and an enemy, A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
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A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear:  
 His humble ambition, proud humility,  
 His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,  
 His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world  
 Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms,  
 That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he –  
 I know not what he shall. God send him well.  
 The court's a learning place, and he is one – (*All's Well That Ends Well*  
 1.1.152-164).

In keeping with the romance archetype, Helen prepares to offer her love to Bertram. Then again, the chivalric concept is transformed as Helen refers not to an exclusive love intended to rise above all other considerations but to countless loves contained under the overriding influence of the commodity of her “virginity”. Helen’s virginity is designed to produce what Paroles describes as “rational increase” (1.1.121); in fact, it allows her to conquer much more elevated fortune than her humble birth had destined her to. Shakespeare unambiguously uses “commodity” to suggest oxymoronic chaos; after all, Helen’s bond with Bertram is “jarring concord [and] sweet disaster” (1.1.159). Thus, by putting old words in a new order and representing new forms of commodity, Shakespeare makes tangible both the concept of Helen as the head of the family circle and the “commonwealth” (1.1.120).

Both *The Dutch Courtesan* and *All's Well that Ends Well* reveal, moreover, how objectification is no longer strictly limited to the female body. In the former, the stage wit Cocledemoy’s monologue explicitly associates men selling objects with them being sold as sexual objects; he brings into conversation the pointmaker, the silkman, the draper and the goldsmith with the bawd to point out how women too had the licence, as the “most worshipful of all the twelve companies [...] sell divine virtues [...] not like a petty chapman, by retail, but like a great merchant, by wholesale” (1.2.31-40). Similarly, money-influenced male relationships and the plot device of the ring are exploited in *Northward Ho*. Here the characters of Featherstone and Greenshield attempt to play a trick on the stock citizen character Mayberry, by pretending they have both seduced his wife after courting her in Mayberry’s shop and by presenting a ring of hers to prove this:

GREENSHIELD	In this passage of our love (amongst other favours of greater value) she bestowed upon me this ring which she protested was her husband's gift.
MAYBERRY	The poesie, the poesie – O my heart, that ring good in faith? [...]
GREENSHIELD	Lying with her as I say: and rising some-what early from her in the morning, I lost this ring in her bed [...] Where I found her falseness; with this Gentleman; who by his own confession pertaking his like enjoyment; found this ring the same morning on her pillow, and sham'd not in my sight to wear it ( <i>Northward Ho</i> 1.1.89-113).

Mayberry gave his wife the ring as visible proof of their marriage vows, to signify his “faith” in her love, and his proprietorship of her body, even during absence. Mayberry’s wife herself evokes how her husband won her hand using the symbol of the ring: “To crowne his finger with that hoop of gold, / I did demand it, but he mad with rage / And with desires unbridled, fled and vow’d, / That ring should me undo” (1.3.114-117). The connection between Mayberry’s “finger” and his “penis” (Partridge “Underworld” 139) are made clear along with the ring’s symbolism as object to withhold his wife’s sexuality and her unwaged labour as a house and shopkeeper. As such, the ring reveals her sexuality to be his exclusive belonging and its loss when she supposedly gives herself to other men. As we have seen, the ring was also a metaphor for the vagina; therefore, when Mayberry insinuates her adultery, he calls upon the ring (as Othello does with the handkerchief) to corroborate his wife’s unfaithfulness: “Then am I a fool, yet I can be wise and I list too: what says my wedding ring?” (1.1.174-175). On the other hand, the object clearly also serves as ocular proof of her fidelity (2.2.88); as a consistently chaste and virtuous wife, Greenshield gives her back the ring (2.2.113) when the subterfuge is revealed by Featherstone (5.1.289). As the play is a comedy, no characters die and Mayberry’s wife goes as far as to challenge objectifying cultural codes: she promises to have her own “will” (2.2.119) over Featherstone, a term that Partridge translates, not just into wish, but into a “passionate, or powerful sexual desire” (“Underworld” 284). She is thus also positioned in the play as reversing traditional sexual hierarchies, thanks to the commodity that should traditionally contain her but that she uses to take control of men’s bodies in her turn.

In *Eastward Ho*, the ring as an easily understood image even points to commodity exchange that solely operates between men. The play is about the goldsmithing that James Knowles analyses as a (masculine) trade symbolic “of the luxury consumer industries which were

developing in the capital”; and, London can be seen as a stage place where “affairs are shown to be less romantic than economic” (xxxii). In *Eastward Ho*, Golding is a hardworking apprentice who rises to alderman. He nonetheless hands over his ring as a token after having made himself prisoner for debt in an attempt to soften the resolve of his father-in-law, Touchstone, against his other, more prodigal, son-in-law Quicksilver, so “that he will presently, and with all secrecy, come hither for my bail” (5.3.97-98). Amanda Bailey remarks how a creditor could seize a debtor’s, goods, lands, or even his person in the case of a default in debt payment. As such, “money and bodies [...] impinged on one another at the moment of default” and an early modern bond was “a highly valued but precarious entitlement dependent on the goodwill of others” (Bailey “Of Bondage” 2-3). Upon seeing the ring, Touchstone admits that he is “plagued for [his] austerity” (5.4.43), before rushing off to the prison to provide the money to bail out his son-in-law and forgive the latter’s spendthrift associates. In Shakespeare, ring symbols are represented in a similar manner; for instance, when Antonio, says “[*To Portia*] I once did lend my body for his wealth / Which, but for him that I had your husband’s ring, / Had quite miscarried” (5.1.249-250), he is also confusing inter and intra-generational relations with mercantilism and, the development of ring symbolism in *All’s Well That Ends Well* is especially striking in the manner in which it translates the confusion for audiences. After being forced to take Helen’s “hand” (2.3.173) by the King of France, Bertram callously sends a letter to his abandoned wife to inform her of his departure for the wars in Italy, where he is to serve the Duke of Florence:

HELEN            [*She reads aloud*] When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband: but in such a ‘then’ I write a ‘never’ (*All’s Well That Ends Well* 3.2.55-58).

At first, Bertram’s style is one of disproportionate confidence that Helen will never meet the requirements to become a wife on his conditions (thanks here to the repetition of “never”). The confidence comes from his ring that is intended to represent the old generation idea of authority of Bertram as a future father. Moreover, in “Giletta of Narbonna”, the thirty-eighth novel of William Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (1575) and one of the major sources of the play, a “sonne” is specifically mentioned (“Arden Shakespeare” 148), not in a letter but in a verbal command by the character of Beltramo, to show that if his wife was successful, he would be making provision to hand down his own power through a continued patriarchal system. As such,

Shakespeare's choice to use the letter to introduce the symbol of the ring can be seen as a doubly significant use of commodity: letters were intended to be shown publicly, often defended the writer's interests and were less self-conscious than speech (Erickson 12). Without the visible symbol of the ring on stage due to the absence of its wearer, the letter can thus be seen as a significant substitute symbol. Unfortunately for Bertram, it is also Helen's "passport" (3.2.54), or vagabond's permit with which she is able to bring back her husband.

As Bertram loses control, his ring progressively becomes an object of mercantilist manoeuvre especially as Helen's former confidant about her "commodity/virginity" and Bertram's warring companion, Paroles is referred to as "ring-carrier" (3.5.90), meaning go-between, to reinforce the evolution. As command literally changes hands, it is Helen who refers to the ring in her bargain with Diana's mother; here, her speech not only destabilises her husband's plans for adultery but also clearly undermines his power thanks to Shakespeare's significant choice of the words "son", "five descents", "will", with the last term (bearing in mind both Freevill and Mayberry's wife's use of it) playing on joint notions of lust and legacy:

HELEN            Now his important blood will naught deny  
                       That she'll demand. A ring the county wears,  
                       That downward hath succeeded in his house  
                       From son to son some four or five descents  
                       Since the first father wore it. This ring he holds  
                       In most rich choice; yet in his idle fire  
                       To buy his will, it would not seem too dear,  
                       Howe'er repented after (*All's Well That Ends Well* 3.7.55-58).

The Second Lord Dumaine also describes how Bertram relinquishes patrilineal control in the former's description of the off-stage seduction of the character Bertram thinks is Diana; Dumaine recounts how Bertram "hath perverted a young gentlewoman [...], of a most chaste renown; and this night he fleshes his will in the spoil of her honour: he hath given her his monumental ring, and thinks himself made in the unchaste composition" (4.7.14-18). Dumaine's language clearly belies Bertram's patriarchal logic, for the latter is not simply relinquishing a memorial ring in his adulterous trade but is redefining "will" as base lust; Bertram squanders former ideas of the stable family structure with a responsible father and guarantor of an ethical lineage at its head. Bertram's gift of the ring in a dubious deal goes



against natural order and allows for a chaos that is only resolved thanks to the King's cash bargain involving Diana at the play's close and which I will examine next.

Women are seen as empowered since they are both receivers and givers of commodities such as rings and letters: Helen throws the ring the King of France has given her out of a Florentine window wrapped in a letter (5.3.95) so that Bertram might retrieve it and it be recognised at court. Diana is then preceded at court by a "petition" (5.3.132) written by Helen to demand retribution for Bertram's misconduct, and finally, Helen herself arrives with her husband's ring and letter (5.3.307-308) to claim him, empower herself and put an unambiguous end to old order patriarchal authority as embodied by either the King or Bertram. Once the symbolism of the ring has been emptied of its social love token substance, it can be reinvented and shown to signify new forms of mercantilist power. Similarly, the exchange of letters over the course of the play makes obvious the transfer of command and ideas of how new forms of commodity can confound former status and authority. Indeed, the King of France himself represents Diana's virginity and her future husband in unambiguous monetary terms at the end of the plot:

THE KING OF FRANCE

[*To Diana*] If thou be'st yet a fresh uncroppèd flower,  
Choose thou thy husband, and I'll pay thy dower;  
For I can guess that by thy honest aid  
Thou keep'st a wife herself, thyself a maid (*All's Well  
That Ends Well* 5.3.323-326).

Helen's profitable use of her virginity has completely undermined former kinds of authority, to the extent that the King gifts a choice of his fellow countrymen to Diana, like commodities. His rhymed verse gives the transaction an appearance of comforting commonplace and yet the artificiality of his language shows a contrivance that suggests the opposite. Instead of expressing order and certainty, his rhymes suggest a brainwashed compliance or nonsensical pandering to commodity.

Commodity has similar ominous significations in *King Lear*, where the division of the kingdom empowers Goneril and Regan, but also leads the country into chaos. Like Bertram, Cordelia refuses to see the end of the old order; she first refuses to pay lip service to her father's vanity and her resulting death can be seen as virtuous sacrifice but her stubbornness can be seen as the upholding a feudal system that has been undermined by the monarch himself. In this sense, Cordelia's character can be seen as at once foolish, a victim or a conservative supporter

of bygone authority. Alternatively, in the subplot, Edmund usurps patriarchal legacy for a while through the tangible object of the letter to his father that blinds Gloucester to his legitimate son's integrity (2.1) and persuades him to change his will in favour of his "natural boy" (2.1.85); here too, however, Gloucester's figurative blindness is made literal (3.7) to demonstrate the damage caused by a blindness to new forms of power. Moreover, while Edgar, the legitimate son who survives them all, seemingly reinstates more honourable forms of state control, he also encapsulates "in a single enigmatic figure the extremes of human possibility *King Lear* explores" (Cantor 251). Besides, if Edmund seemingly takes control thanks to the commodity of the letter, Edgar assumes authority by deciding to play at Tom of Bedlam (2.3.14), precisely in the scene featuring the term "commodities": he manipulates the old man to believe "Tom" will lead Gloucester to his desired suicide over the Dover cliffs (4.1.79-80) and the old man's heart bursts and he dies when he realises how he has been tricked and who Edgar really is (5.3.193-200). As such, children remain a constant challenge to any stable definition of commodity: first, by destabilising old order meanings and then by refusing to acknowledge or allow others to perceive (Rosenberg 246) any stable reading of the term. What is made clear is that Edgar, who has the last words in the play, totally embodies the "weight of this sad time" (5.3.322) since he has himself manipulated commodity bias to his own advantage.

By employing a monetary metaphor ("weight"), he reminds audiences of Falconbridge's weighted bowl imagery in *King John* and how quickly power can be transferred from one person to another. We hear Edgar announcing that, as the probable future king, what he intends to do is "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.299): commodity has enabled him to say what he likes ("what we feel") without taking others into consideration ("what we ought to say"). This uncannily reminds the audience of Lear's despotic and selfish edicts at the beginning of the action and prompts fears that all the death and chaos has taught Edgar nothing: Lear became nobody, his kingdom was reduced to nothing and, while his individualism profited others for a while, their profitable expediency was only short-lived. Edgar's last words suggest that the process could repeat itself; commodity, while it is can be infinitely reiterated, still implies no social regeneration. In an alternative to the above interpretation, however, Shakespeare could be "offering a place for the Cordelias of the world", since this character does speak what she feels and does not say what she ought to (Keinänen Personal communication). Cordelia could hence be said, like Emilia, to accept "the [good] parrhesiastic game" ("Meaning" para. 17), even if this means death.

The protagonists are thus intermediaries between Shakespeare as a writer inventing his fiction and the audience who has to try and work out its own truth with regards to a clear

definition of authority. From the initial scene of theatrical court flattery everything becomes artificial so the audience is cued to be wary of appearances. When Lear sees himself as “Every inch a king” (4.5.104), we have stopped believing him because he is no longer a king, only a ruler of nature and weeds. Characters are forced to use theatrical devices, metaphors and disguises to compensate their loss of power and we finally have to ask ourselves whether authority is not simply just a play on our imaginations. For example, we see by the middle of the play that even justice is play acting; the mock trial scene (3.6) is a mere sham of justice as there is no-one in the dock and only three madmen as judges. We become aware that the characters experience a bitter disappointment with the reality of any form of commodity. Lear is furious with Cordelia for her disobedience and angry with her sisters for their treatment of him. Yet he is incapable, because he has given away his authority, to obtain revenge in any other way than symbolically: “thy truth then be thy dower” (1.1.98), he says to Cordelia, and he shouts at the storm as if by his defiance he could control the elements: “Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow” (3.2.1). Lear refuses to take lessons about commodity from anyone except the Fool but, when the Fool has finished his stage-work, he vanishes from the play and professional commodity madness, the most authoritative type, gives way to feigned and real madness, which is totally unreliable.

The Fool’s plain and authoritative prose is substituted by the king’s lyrical speeches, on the heath (3.2) and a mixture of verse and prose (3.4) when he meets Poor Tom and his wits begin to turn; at the same time the folly of his acts becomes clearer to him. Gloucester is led on in both senses of the term by his son Edgar, when the latter is disguised as Poor Tom, and when he meets Lear (4.6), but cannot see that the former regent is no longer fit to rule. Lear and Gloucester can only exist in a fantasy world once their authority is overruled and when both men come to realise the truth about commodity this will lead to their deaths: Gloucester dies when Edgar reveals his true identity and Lear when he realises that he has been instrumental in the deaths of his daughters. Jean Fuzier has suggested that the laughter provoked by the Fool’s professional madness and Edgar’s feigned one are to reflect the laughter of the audience from that of the king. I suggest that it also highlights the fact that abandoning one’s social responsibilities as an *auctor* in pursuit of commodious self-interest is no laughing matter.

Shakespeare’s mimetic world shows us that Lear’s problem throughout is that he does not manage to see what his responsibility really is. It is usual to say that the play is about seeing and not seeing. Hence, as Maynard Mack has remarked, visual metaphors are also important to our understanding of the play. For instance, the sight of Kent in the stocks (2.2) framed by vice (Regan and Cornwall) on one side and folly (the Fool) on the other is a clear sign that justice is

to be barred from the action (57). Edgar as a madman leading his blind father to Dover is also a poignant image of the chaotic universe that Lear's abandoning of authority for commodity has created. Shakespeare is perhaps suggesting, therefore, that blind commodity idolatry should give way to more clear-sighted and charitable rule within the family as much as within the state. Accordingly, I now explore how such an evolution is encouraged by parents.

### **3.8 New commodity; new authority in marriage**

In *The Winter's Tale*, commodity also means representation of old and young generation self, especially in marriage. Hermione's trial does not simply mean the off-stage death of Mamilius but is a watershed moment in the matter of new forms of language. The queen's compelling speech involving commodity is a case in point because her use of language is in stark contrast with the disjointed communication of her husband over the first half of the play. In addition, although she claims to acknowledge Leontes as a king, husband and a father, her speech disclaims all three powers; in fact, Hermione's language signals an empowered fresh form of authority:

HERMIONE

Sir, spare your threats:

The bug which you would fright me with, I seek.  
To me can life be no commodity.  
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,  
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone  
But know not how it went. My second joy,  
And first-fruits of my body, from his presence  
I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,  
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,  
The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,  
Haled out to murder: myself on every post  
Proclaimed a strumpet, with immodest hatred  
The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs  
To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried  
Here to this place, i'th' open air, before  
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,  
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,  
That I should fear to die (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.89-106)?

Shakespeare has Hermione use unrhymed iambic pentameter to produce a regular rhythmic effect. Her stressed words “bug”, “you”, “fright” (3.2.90) highlight the power of jealousy that has overtaken Leontes: he has lost his own command and has not even allowed Hermione enough time to rest after giving birth to their daughter Perdita (3.2.101). The accentuated “seek” and “me” (3.2.90-91) seem to signal that the danger of Leontes’ extreme threats must be countered. The words signify, thanks to the vigorous and forceful “s” and the melodious assonance of “ee” sounds, how Hermione, who has already successfully used her voice to convince Polixenes to stay longer at court, uses it again to persuade Leontes to realise his tragic mistake. Commodity is not simply a term to describe private or selfish interest but is being used as a weapon to counteract Leontes, who ranks above Hermione, and invert the power system. Thus, the calming accentuated nasal sounds “m” and “n” in “me”, “no” and “commodity” (3.2.91) contrast with the harsh consonant alliteration of “c” just afterwards in “crown” or “comfort” (3.2.92) because the latter are more threatening and expose the injustice of Leontes’ ignominious behaviour towards his wife.

Shakespeare’s language is logical: it signals how Hermione, who has been shown to have had a voice (1.2), feels empowered to use it again in this dire situation and how she encourages her public (Leontes or spectators) to listen to her. If she is never completely free, especially in the context of a courtroom just before being put in prison, it is remarkable that Hermione is allowed to exercise such liberty of tongue despite everything. Mamilius’ forced separation (3.2.96) or Perdita’s programmed execution for supposedly being Polixenes’ daughter (3.2.99) become the visual symbols of her loss of status but, at the same time, enable her claim to power in that she no longer fears death (3.2.106). Hermione mentions Leontes’ accusations of her being a “strumpet” (3.2.100) to further undermine the legitimacy of the king’s right to use excessive speech and, by extension, power, because such familiar language demonstrates baseness rather than greatness. Hermione even successfully asserts power over Leontes by declaring state power of execution herself. She can transmit new interpretations to the new generation represented by her surviving child, Perdita, whose sentence has been transformed into banishment to what will turn out to be Bohemia.

When the imprisoned Hermione is represented by Paulina, we see another resistant female presence. Paulina presents Perdita to Leontes in an attempt to clarify the King’s confusion. Her *parrhesia*, (telling “the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament which might encode or hide it” (Foucault “Courage” para. 19)) should logically convince Leontes to change his mind and reverse the destructive process, but

her use of blazoned prose seems instead to recall the absent queen's own objectification by reducing the child to a collection of body parts:

PAULINA        Although the print be little, the whole matter  
                    And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,  
                    And trick of the frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,  
                    The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,  
                    The very mould and frame of his hand, nail, finger (*The Winter's Tale*  
                    2.3. 99-103).

In reconstructing the whole, she remarks: "No yellow in't" (2.3.107), so as to exclude any purported treason and in an attempt to reconcile the royal couple. However, the king refuses to hear or see reason and stubbornly resolves to atomise his daughter, the metaphorical linguistic fragmentation becomes literal in this way. Leontes' failure to see through his confusion shows how the king's jealousy has twisted the image he should see in his daughter's features to realise that she is in fact his child. It follows that if words have no meaning then seeing cannot be believing; to Leontes, Perdita is no longer his daughter. Moreover, the potentiality of language seems to run out altogether after Mamilius' death. If there is a term for losing one's parents (orphan) or losing one's spouse (widow or widower), no word exists in the English language for the loss of a child, as if denied inheritance should result in both linguistic and literal disintegration. From this angle, the heir's demise is more than just to create dramatic pace as it becomes emblematic of a wintry void calling for the spring-like re-creation of the commodity later in the play. This is why the brother figure is transplanted by that of the sister, in other words Perdita, whose fertility is echoed in the metaphor of Bohemian spring.

The plot indeed moves sixteen years on and from winter to spring-cum-summer and a Bohemian sheep-shearing festival "done any time between mid-May and the end of July" (Orgel "Oxford Shakespeare" 164-165). The sheep-shearing scene begins with the appearance of the ballad peddler Autolycus, whose ballads verbally repeat past dramatic action in a comic counterpoint to Leontes' tragic misconceptions. The new ballads are set to music so as to reactivate the audible and visual reception of past events. As such, the playwright is setting up two contrapuntal voices sharing the same melodic material, with one voice passing to the other in parody in the sense of "[going] beside the ode" (ODEE "parody" 652). Moreover, the character of Autolycus is textual interplay itself because he is already his own double. In Ovid he is the son of Mercury: "the patron of thieves and liars" (Orgel "Oxford Shakespeare" 50).

His mythological twin, Philammon, was the child of Apollo, the God of music and himself became a famous musician. Stephen Orgel notes that, in *Metamorphoses* (2.303-317), “the ballad singing Autolycus is impersonating his twin” and that “the myth is relevant both to the twinship fantasy of Leontes and Polixenes and to the larger and more vexing question of the determination of paternity” (“Oxford Shakespeare” 50).

Autolycus’ tale is also relevant to the retelling of *The Winter’s Tale* because, as he is both “a thief and seller of commodities” (Drakakis Personal communication), he clearly situates the action within a mercantilist context. He parodies Leontes’ peddling of Hermione to persuade Polixenes to remain at court as well as Leontes’ cruel disrobing of her commodity, or comfort, to give the play a different perspective: the farce of Autolycus’ cony-catching parodies the tragedy of “Virtues [...] whipped out of the court” (4.3.81-828), or Hermione’s figurative and literal stripping of her courtly well-being and children. Autolycus is thus clearly able to exteriorise what the king was unable to communicate; as the audience is privy to Autolycus’ true nature, spectators are given the impression of a perception that was lacking beforehand in the plot (we are not aware that Hermione is still alive after the trial for example). Thus, if Autolycus’ only contribution to the workings of the drama is his “knavery” (4.4.663) in helping the characters and the plot return to Sicily, he has a more emblematic role to play in the action; he re-tells what Baldwin Maxwell calls a “remote and marvellous tale” (“Pelican Shakespeare” 469) so as to render it less remote for audiences. Like Autolycus’s cony-catching, Shakespeare’s Bohemian sheep shearing festival is a plausible hands-on experience where the play’s participants grapple with notions of commodity in a down to earth manner.

Despite the realism, we are nonetheless presented with various layers of meaning. For instance, Perdita, the “boy acting girl who is a princess supposed to be a shepherdess acting as a make-believe princess” (Overton 69), is now Flora, “mistress o’th’ feast” (4.4.69), and she has come out of the dark in the manner of her mythological literary predecessor, Proserpina, to tell a new tale; indeed, the princess is disguised as Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres, from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. The simultaneously life-like, and symbolic, character sheds light on notions of commodity emerging from the philosophical debate that she undertakes with the Bohemian king Polixenes over the hegemony of art, or nature’s creation, over artifice, a creation of a man-made kind in a battle of words over botanical grafting. Polixenes favours the latter: “Yet nature is made better by no mean / But nature makes that mean. So over art / Which you say adds to nature is an art / That nature makes” (4.4.89-92). However, old generation Polixenes’ prose is characteristically circular, just as Leontes’ word play had been and Shakespeare has Perdita pointedly rebuke his condescending endearments such as “you see,



sweet maid” (4.4.92), because she refuses to be objectified as her mother was before her. Perdita also resists Polixenes by refusing the streaked carnations commonly associated with sexual licence (“Norton Shakespeare” 2932) and that she refers to as “nature’s bastards” (4.4.83), as if to protect herself from objectification. On the contrary, her steadfast opposition to commodity underlines her understanding of the risks entailed in all its meanings.

As with *King Lear*, however, the young generation characters’ representation remains ambiguous: Perdita is hardly the idealised representation of purity or the conventional upholder of her father’s patriarchal authority. Like Edgar, she contests submission to male representatives of power such as Polixenes by fleeing with Florizel (4.4.531), and then only acknowledges Leontes as “father” (5.1.202) so that the latter will aid the young couple to wed without Polixenes’ consent. Once again, if Perdita and Florizel are the legitimate figures of the young generation, their power is in part the result of manipulation and the loss of old generation authority embodied by Leontes or Polixenes. Besides, while the patriarchal system seems to be restored on a more ethical basis thanks to Florizel and Perdita’s marriage or Leontes and Hermione’s reunion after the queen emerges from her sixteen years’ hiding, Shakespeare nonetheless appears to suggest that the new order is actually more concerned with stratagems and tactics that allow characters to negotiate and profit from new concepts of commodity rather than any real social considerations.

In the debate over grafting, for instance, there can be no real dispute over the fact that Perdita is contradicting herself (nature’s improvement by man is in fact nature, as man is natural in the first place and Perdita agrees with Polixenes on this point: “So it is” (4.4. 98)). In fact, the controversy between the claims of art and nature was a Renaissance topos, as Stephen Orgel argues: “Analogues to Perdita’s argument can be found in Montaigne [‘Of the Cannibals’, *Essays*, trans John Florio (1632), 102] and analogues to Polixenes’ in Puttenham [The Art of English Poetry, ed. Willcock and Walker (1936) 303 ff.]” (“Oxford Shakespeare” 172). So, we must look elsewhere to try and grasp the playwright’s point: Shakespeare’s argument seems to be that that Perdita reiterates the chastity that befitted a Renaissance female such as her mother or herself, whilst at the same time underlining notions of commodity that widen the play’s horizons and can be seen as a self-conscious statement on artistic invention. In this way, love making, whether this be of a physical or a literary sort is clarified, and personified, by the character of Perdita/Flora, which is itself a commodity as part of a play, which audiences paid to watch. As such, there are no longer any confused associations concerning love and innocence; on the contrary, the concept of reproduction takes on a larger meaning as it becomes focused on the representatives of both a natural and literary inheritance

as shown by Perdita's symbolic flower distribution to Polixenes and Camillo's response to it: "I should leave grazing were I of your flock, / And only live by gazing" (4.4.108-109), where Shakespeare links the two levels of meaning audibly and visually through use of paronomasia ("grazing"/"gazing"). The evolution also operates both on a mimetic level (from child to adult, heir to throne, life to death) or on a diegetic one, as the numerous intertextual mythological references in the scene show. Successive layering of theatrical conceits, rather than adding confusion to spectators' perception of events, makes them easier to apprehend and leads to writer-reader/spectator communication.

Not the least of these possibilities is provided by the ambiguity of the last scene. Autolycus' "double occasion: gold, and a means to do the Prince my master good" (4.4.826-827) in helping the shepherd and his son to navigate their way towards the truth of Perdita's identity is a binary means to make a whole, as it leads to the off-stage reunion of Leontes, his daughter and future son-in-law, when the plot returns to Sicily. This also highlights the new underlying expansion of ideologies since Autolycus also sees the reconciliation of old and new notions of commodity as an opportunity for personal "advancement" (4.4.845). As boundaries have been blurred by Shakespeare's use of parody, spectators are able to cross over into this new world of theatrical illusion. Raphael Lyne notes:

In representing stories that recall an emblematic connection, but do not just act it out, they may draw attention to the artificiality and contrivance required to present such a notion. The nexus of truth and time, of seeing and believing, shows Shakespeare advancing, and returning to, a powerful and substantial structuring certainty both in truth and the idea that it can be seen and believed (43).

Thus, Hermione, who has been accused of being a mother of the "baser kind", appears as a statue, another commodity, on a pedestal, another "base" but this time upon which she is able to reawaken the "faith" (5.3.95) of Leontes. Significantly too, all the while Hermione is stage-directed by Paulina as the latter assumes authority over the credulity of Hermione's husband. Hermione, now represented as a character representing an object and a living person (and played by a living actor), may be seen as a resistance to Leontes' objectification of her in a way that mixes old and new forms of commodity. It certainly allows for the amazed king to look upon what he sees as an effigy with passionate longing. He says, "For I will kiss her" (5.3.79), whilst clear-sighted Perdita's reason recognises the "carver's excellence" (5.3.30) for what it is: the consequences of a craftsmanship which recalls the topos of Ovid's Pygmalion

story and provides a logical explanation for events. Victor Turner explains the process as follows: “[E]xperience’ derives, via Middle English and Old French, from the Latin *experientia*, denoting ‘trial, proof, experiment’ [per-] with the core meaning of ‘forward’, ‘through’ [...] ‘I pass *through*’” and in which “meaning emerges through ‘reliving’ the original experience (often a social drama subjectively perceived), and is given an appropriately aesthetic form” (“Ritual” 17).

So, in *The Winter’s Tale*, what we should see behind the statue, an art object, bought from an Italian artist, is a woman believed dead (Howard Personal communication). Then again, the stage-managed spectacle of the made-up boy playing the part of the living woman produces another layer to this already complex concept that seems capable of reproducing itself (including within the commodity of the text) indefinitely. What is more, Shakespeare uses this theatrical pretence as a foil with which to glorify his own poetry. For when the playwright places Hermione before Leontes and Perdita, he creates a moment of complete aesthetic concord. As the queen stands between her husband and daughter she is at once a work of art, or a “dead likeness” (5.3.15), and a living thing, for readers of the text are aware that she is only “[standing like a statue]” (5.3.22), and spectators are made aware of her “much wrinkled” (5.3.27) appearance. Nonetheless, as has been shown, what is important to the playwright is the evolution of the plot towards the theatrical truth about commodity, or as Raphael Lyne puts it: “In the end the vital thing is that romances excite both wonder and reason, defying the possibility that they exclude one another” (43).

### 3.9 Evolving notions of commodity in the text

What is also striking about the changes Shakespeare made to these plays with reference to his sources is that he systematically adds easily recognisable material commodities. *The Comedy of Errors* provides a good example thanks to the highly derivative nature of its sources, ranging from Plautus’ *Menaechmi* or *Amphitruo*, sixteenth-century Italian drama, earlier English comedies such as Lawrence Twine’s *The Pattern of Painful Adventures* (1576), the pamphlet literature of Nashe or Green and Gower’s *Apollonius of Tyre* or the Bible (Cartwright 75, 87, 89). In Shakespeare’s play, the shawl, which in Plautus’ *Menaechmi* the married twin has stolen from his wife to give to his courtesan, becomes more material in the golden chain, ordered from a goldsmith for Adriana (3.1.117), which is circulated among the characters and “whereby each blunder generates its successor” (Cartwright 11) starting from the fact that the goldsmith delivers it to the wrong Antipholus. The object thus becomes an “error-compounding property” (Cartwright 35). Audiences would have perhaps seen a chained Egeon on stage as he

awaited sentence, foregrounding the decline of parental authority represented by the cerebral notion of “great chain of being”. And later his children are shown to grapple with more concrete objects of trade in a consistent representation of the evolution of notions of property and power. A clear message is sometimes difficult to perceive, as for example when Adriana clearly would have preferred a manifestation of marital love rather than the piece of jewelry from her husband (2.1.105-107). Nonetheless, the gold chain is a tangible representation of how the characters are all connected through commodity.

Furthermore, Plautus’ *Amphitruo* inspired Shakespeare’s addition of twin slaves, who, even at the time of Shakespeare’s writing, were still considered mere moveable goods. Sources such as Thomas Edgar provide a clue as to how the Dromios would be mentally represented as commodities rather than characters:

Juftice Booke 12. H. 8.fo 4. Afirmeth plainly, that if a man beat an outlaw, a traitor, a Pagan, his villein, or his wife it is dispunishable, because by the Law Common these persons can have no action (128).

As few, if any, entitlements were accorded to early modern women, common criminals (“outlaw”), reprehensible heretics (“Pagan”), or domestic servants (“villein”), “who worked the land of their immediate lord, who subsisted on their share in the arable fields, meadow, woods and common pasture, and who inherited their customary rights from their fathers” (Knights 16) even if, villein right had, by then, been transformed into a variety of tenures, and even the status of landless wage labourer, who owned nothing but his labour (Knights 22, 33). Similarly, Shakespeare’s addition would have shown actual commodities such as the chain onstage alongside characters that were commercially considered objects. Such adaptations were appropriate to enhance awareness of these evolutions through a shared early modern theatrical experience for his spectators.

The amendments made to *The Merchant of Venice* also suggest a link between romantic quest and mercantilism (Drakakis 61). For instance, Shakespeare adapts the way Portia is won in History 32 of Richard Robinson’s 1595 translation of the medieval collection of stories *Gesta Romanorum* from wooing to making the right choice between the three caskets. A story in Giovanni Fiorentino’s 1558 collection *Il Pecorone* (“The sheep” or “The Duncel”) provided the source for the pound of flesh story that opposed “natural” and “unnatural” money lending and that, when fused with the casket tale, resulted in a play that revolves around the circulation of commodities rather than romance. The issue thus becomes how notions of convenience and

profit are internalised “in the everyday behaviour of human subjects, and how that behaviour is theatrically represented” (Drakakis 53). In this framework, calculation and profitable self-interest can override the patriarchy that binds the Christian or Jewish communities together. Further, the drastic redefinition of commodity in *The Merchant of Venice* signals the end of an era and a transition to private profit rather than public-spirited relationships (Yaffe 51) that seems to be translated in the play through Antonio’s lines concerning “the commodity [meaning commercial agreements] that strangers have / With us in Venice” (3.3.27-28). The changes may not be so surprising in that the text itself would have been emended in its composition to accommodate performance conditions and actors and enhance the play’s chances of being offered up for sale to patrons or theatre goers as a vendible exchange good in its own right. Nonetheless, we have to reconsider the plays as unique authorial objects and analyse their status as new generation commodities, which is what I now do concerning the remaining plays in the group being studied in this chapter.

### **3.10 The text itself as a new commodity**

As G. K. Hunter notes, from whatever version he derived *All’s Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare was not content to leave authorship as he found it and made a number of changes in “emphasis and effect” (xxvi). The resulting play was conceivably a hybrid of two “prompt copy” performance texts or perhaps even a “foul-papers copy” (Hunter xi, xiii). To back up this latter view, Hunter lists inconsistencies such as ambiguous stage directions, silent entries, presences of ghosts and songs as part of context. Even the title of the play requires some mental gymnastics: *A Bad Beginning makes a Good Ending, Loves Labours Wonne*, (Hunter xix) are two former headings that highlight the development of Shakespeare’s artistic creation. The adaptation of former plot outlines from different sources also testifies to diverse inspiration. Shakespeare clearly found dramatic momentum in the ninth novel of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* but he most probably also consulted William Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (1566, 1569, and 1575) that translates both the Italian *Decameron* and its French version by Antoine le Maçon. Perhaps, because Shakespeare had some knowledge of French, he may have used the Gallic adaptation directly. The sources were themselves variations of the original text that may testify to the playwright’s intention to present a balanced vision of old and young generation visions of commodity to spectators. Whatever the intention, with these new additions, Shakespeare was definitely creating a new commodity compared to his sources, as was also the case for *King Lear*.

In *King Lear* the developments between the Quarto (1608) and Folio (1623) editions provide a partial justification of the ambiguous authorial voice concerning young generation commodity in the play. In the Folio text for instance, Cordelia abruptly appears unheralded and at the head of a French army in Act 4 scene 4, which makes her seem more warlike, while in the Quarto text the description of the character as “an emblem of pity shedding holy tears is followed by her entry in 4.4 accompanied by a doctor lending support to a milder conception of her” (Foakes 37). Similarly, the Folio text has more lines describing the riotous behaviour of Lear’s retinue of a hundred knights in Goneril’s house (Foakes 40) to make her decision to deprive him of his “commodity” more plausible. Then, the Quarto gives Edgar an expanded role: he participates in the mock trial (3.6) and comments on the death of his father (5.3), perhaps “to explain or justify the suffering of others” (Foakes 49). Finally, in the Folio, Edgar is given the final lines of the play to perhaps hint that he will be the new ruler, in replacement of the Quarto version, where Albany speaks last to suggest that Edgar will only have a supporting role (Foakes 49). The later modifications seem to support the idea of a replacement of the old autocratic system of commodity by a younger framework, where Machiavellian young generation politicians are able to manipulate power to profitable ends. Whatever the interpretation, apart from highlighting the difficulty of locating a stable authoritative voice concerning influence in the text, these changes chiefly show how the play becomes an ever-evolving commodity itself, probably due to developments over successive performances and replacements of actors in the roles.

Shakespeare even appears to allow for such development in *The Winter’s Tale* thanks to alterations to its major source, Robert Greene’s *Pandosto; The Triumph of Time* (1588). At the end of Greene, the “repentant king falls in love with his still unidentified daughter; and when he learns who she is, kills himself, to be succeeded on the throne by his unsullied daughter and son-in-law” (Orgel “Oxford Shakespeare” 7). As we have seen, at the beginning of the action in *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes, the opening figure of power, is akin to the stage director in a play, ordering his wife to “speak” (1.2.28). As the action evolves, however, his wife is forced to take upon the role of playwright, actor and director herself to correct the errors that Leontes has dangerously made about her (3.2). As such, the contrition shown by Leontes to Paulina, who has rebelled against the stage director by calling him a “tyrant” (3.2.205) after the death of his son and supposed demise of Hermione, signals a theatrical as well as an ethical “recreation”:

LEONTES        Thou didst speak but well

When most the truth, which I receive much better  
Than to be pitied of thee. Prithee, bring me  
To the dead bodies of my queen and son.  
One grave shall be for both. Upon them shall  
The causes of their death appear, unto  
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit  
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there  
Shall be my recreation (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.230-238).

Paulina, assuming authority over Leontes from then on, also allows for Shakespeare's subversive usurpation of the ending of *Pandosto*. Under the cover of his character he appropriates Greene's tragedy of the king's death by a meta-theatrical resurrection of the queen in the form of the artistic commodity of the statue (5.3). In depicting the statue, Shakespeare uses a variety of means drawn from theatre, painting, sculpture, figurative language and music: for example, we have theatrical tricks, "Shall I draw the curtain?" (5.3.83); painting, "The ruddiness upon her lip is wet. / You'll mar it if you kiss it, stain your own / With oily painting" (5.3.81-83); sculpture "our carver's excellence" (5.3.30); anthropomorphism: "I'll make the statue move indeed, descend, / And take you by the hand" (5.3.88-89); and music "Music, awake her; strike!" (5.3.99). I imagine, therefore, that the fetishised statue (in a religious and mercantile sense) would have clearly been able to restage the commodity experience for the audience. Whereas before Leontes was an on-stage observer, now he almost seems to have left the stage to become a spectator himself.

All in all, the old commodity that went out of focus has been replaced by a new one that is now clearly the centre of attention. Leontes is literally struck dumb by Paulina's artifice: "I like your silence; it the more shows off / Your wonder" (5.3.21-22). Moreover, Shakespeare has Paulina's commodity swindle further confuse Leontes for, as she recreates a parallel framework of artistry to the king's commodity, he is forced to conclude that we are being "mocked with art" (5.3.68), and the only option left open to us is to silently marvel. Indeed, we have seen that new forms of commodity require "silence as a discipline or as the requisite condition for the contemplation of God" (Foucault "Meaning" para. 9). Leontes, like Othello but in Romantic mode, also perceives in the statue a sense of truth and rightness, setting aside all intellectual logic as he does so. Paulina's sculptor and musicians are the creators of such a reality. When Paulina "draw[s] the curtain" (5.3.69), it is to reveal another representation of commodity and the word "curtain", apart from the drama metaphor the word contains, becomes



a parody of itself in the sense that there is nothing left to hide. Paulina's stage directions are Shakespeare's way of showing us a greater theatrical truth of a capacity for commodity renewal. Shakespeare's "excellence" lies in how he shows audiences the workings of drama whilst his tale telling makes spectators willing to forget that the theatrical machinery is there. In other words, this is the playwright's ultimate *Triumph of Commodity*.

### 3.11 Conclusion

The five plays under consideration have been significant in that they show how definitions of commodity and inter-generational authority were changing in the period. I have examined how young generation characters undermine parental command thanks to new understandings of commodity. The fact that in both comedy and tragedy (*The Comedy of Errors*, *King Lear*) the term "commodities" rather than "commodity" is used further prompts us to deal with Shakespeare's multifaceted appraisal of a new order. The demise of old order patriarchy and "convenience" gives momentum to the plots and leaves open possibilities of disrupting carefully coded cultural structures that early modern society officially accorded to parents. In the comedies, children are exposed to insecurity, empowered and combine egotism and income; in the tragedies they are sometimes denied emancipation or must manipulate their former selves and others to achieve power; and the Romance entitles them to a process of regeneration thanks to commodity that involves both diversity of genre and of language. New order influence through commodity is thus at once material, Machiavellian and, at the end of the day, uncertain.

Shakespeare's text itself embodies this ambiguity in that it refuses to passively comply with its forefathers. Yet the plays, by reinforcing tangible notions of self-interest, also imply the disintegration of any stable notions of significance. The young characters' shifting values as commodities, the spread of notions of exchange markets to foreign countries or the reminder to spectators of how society was moving towards an inalterable system of nascent capitalism at private and public levels would have been highlighted by the vulnerability of the youth subject to these changes being represented on the stage. The study of the evolving meaning of commodity in the text also challenges the notion of the play as a distinct entity in a natural order and proposes a vision of a commodity whose nature is both contrived and disorderly but at the same time ensures its capacity for infinite renewal and performance. In the next chapter we shall see how the performers themselves, along with some of their potential spectators, had also to continuously recreate and redefine themselves: to reconcile reality and representation and experience agency despite their official repression.

- **CHAPTER FOUR: VISUALISING COMMODITY, CONSUMING VISUAL COMMODITIES: THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

FALSTAFF     I bought him in Paul's, and he'll buy me a horse in Smithfield. An I could get me but a wife in the stews, I were manned, horsed, and wived (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.44-46).

As we have seen, commodities for sale could be found everywhere in early modern London but exchange goods were not limited to concrete marketplace items. Falstaff's tongue-in-cheek consumerist tour of its low life areas allows Shakespeare's audiences the experience of the monetary representation of animals in Smithfield, serving men looking for employment in St. Paul's and prostitutes in the Stews, so called because of the frequent use of public hot-air bath-houses, or stews, for dissolute purposes (OED "stew"). Shakespeare's language thus presents people as exchange goods in certain particular cases and suggests the early modern mindset could place animals, humans and merchandise on an undifferentiated par for value. Moreover, Falstaff's allusion to real-life markets such as the "stews" and "Smithfield" on a stage establishes a commercial network that links up the marketplace and the theatre. Knights has noted how drama, more obviously than any other form of art, is a social product and should thus help us trace the connection to what we now term as the business (OED 1899) bases of society (5). Shakespeare's plays cover a wide range of societal issues and statuses. They provide a broad point of reference with which to examine early modern prostitution and the theatre. That female characters were played by male actors further justifies the focus on theatre to address the issue, especially as Shakespeare was a theatre proprietor himself and, at the time, the acting profession was considered by some as a form of prostitution (Lenz "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution"). Shakespeare's works are thus a valuable contribution to the topic of commodification.

Admittedly, the subject is a well-documented one, yet it is nonetheless worthwhile expanding on contemporary research that addresses separate issues of Shakespeare and early modern poverty and vagrancy (Pound, Beier), female prostitution (Burford, Shugg, Sharpe), or hired men, whether in husbandry or as actors (Kusmaul, Beckermann, Gurr and Ichikawa). Whores, for instance, engage in cross-cultural debates on commodity, since they were an increasingly visible part of Shakespeare's London, whether on stage or off it (Salkeld 135, 166). We see, moreover, that Shakespeare's representation of commodity refuses to categorise a division of society according to essentially patriarchal market interests; it rather encourages the

audience to think beyond categories of victimisation and objectification. Shakespeare hence establishes the centrality of gender and especially female agency (women acting independently instead of waiting for men to make choices and have women act on those choices) in brokering societal relations. Moreover, as female characters were performed by male actors, identity and gender dissolve through staged experience. Further, as performance was also a commodity bought by spectators, playgoers of all degrees could, at least for the length of a performance, become consumers on their own terms. Jean E. Howard has remarked how early modern theatre was both the “symbol of changing social conditions and practices” controlled by the power mechanisms of society but also a commodity, “which the public paid money to see and over which, consequently, they exercised a certain degree of control” (“Stage” 43). If even the lowliest “harlots”, “strumpets”, “punks” or “whores” (all of which can be found in Shakespeare) could consume the visual commodities of plays, perhaps other audience members might position themselves as “consumers, critics, spectators” (Howard “Crossdressing” 440), despite Falstaff’s claims.

I will thus examine commodity on Shakespeare’s stage, in particular the representations of women as prostitutes, the lowest form of commodity. I combine the two very different brothel contexts in *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Pericles* that show women to be subservient, sold for money and yet reveal ways in which Shakespeare allows commodity to go beyond categories of victimisation and objectification. In fact, Shakespeare reveals that “minor” figures such as Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet have more agency than they have been given credit for. Previous critics have focussed on the lonely stray life of the prostitute (Haselkorn, Goodman), finding that commodified women were socially isolated but a focus on prostitution in Shakespeare helps us reassess the idea. On stage, traditionally marginalised female characters such as Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet can be regarded as examples, not of ostracism, but of resistance to deprivation of agency. On the other hand, male characters such as Falstaff, Prince Hal or Lysimachus are revealed to be particularly unscrupulous in their dealings in the brothel. In fact, the brothel acts as a subjective mirror to early modern society in an illustration of the disastrous effects of confusing life with commodities. From the outset it is clear that Prince Hal is in love with role playing and Lysimachus is in love with Marina playing prostitute rather than the woman herself. This points to the artificiality of the two men or their experiences. Further, their cynical and amoral responses to those around them are consistent with their Machiavellian codes and the commodification of authority in early modern society.

As such, Shakespeare’s brothel scenes unambiguously create awareness of how men lead a double life of outward social respectability (or at least taking care of their reputation and

opinion of others) whilst secretly transgressing society's moral codes. Gamini Salgado notes in his publication on popular history, how the playhouse was a "favourite prelude to the brothel, either as a place of assignation or as an appetizer for later pleasures" (58). Inversely, the brothel could act as a prologue to a performance of early modern consumer culture that defies traditional gender and identity boundaries. As such, Shakespeare's plays encourage debate not only on the role of art and its relation to morality but on how the brothel somehow bears testimony to a life of duality involving commodity. Prince Hal and Lysimachus, without revealing themselves as reckless in their relations to society, nonetheless revel in their shady, immoral brothel activities whilst seemingly escaping the consequences.

The sharp contrast between their outward respectability and their pleasure-for-money within the brothel, however, conflates them with the prostitutes that they ostensibly distance themselves from. I will thus first examine the evolving historical framework of prostitution in early modern England, where the end of regulated prostitution resulted in a disintegration of patriarchal power and a certain amount of female empowerment. Then, I analyse resistance to commodification by Shakespeare's women characters in brothel contexts. Finally, I will demonstrate how the social order is confused, with authoritative male characters shown to prostitute themselves. Indeed, the new societal paradigm was made visible in Shakespeare's theatre, where the shift in conceptions, in which the consumer and the commodity stand combined, is fully represented.

#### **4.2 The changing nature of prostitutes as commodities**

To better understand Shakespeare's depiction of prostitution, we need to assess the changing nature of prostitutes in early modern England. I will thus begin within what the early modern pamphleteer Robert Greene, in *A notable discouery of coosenage* (1592), terms the "Trugging place" (4), his euphemism for the whorehouse, because "trugge" (2) was his synonym for whore. Eric Partridge, in *A Dictionary of the Underworld*, helpfully explains how "trug" later merged into "trull" and "truck", "a word for exchange" (743-744), perhaps foreseeing how whores possessed the power to reinvent themselves in defiance of an ideological structure that saw them as passive and subservient objects. If Greene explicitly designates whores as merchandise dispossessed of power ("The Whore: a Commodity" 2), sex workers' important role in early modern England meant that they could also serve as market intermediaries that bound people together within a community of shared desire. The common prostitute was an exchange object to be randomly sold for possession and subsequently enjoyed

by cash buyers and yet contemporaneous literature such as Greene's also recognises the dangers to the social order of the seductive power of even the cheapest female goods for sale:

Ah gentlemen, merchants, yeomen and farmers, let this to you all, and to every degree else, be a caveat to warn you from lust, that your inordinate desire be not a means to impoverish your purses, discredit your good names, condemns your souls, [...] Some fond men are so far in with these detestable trugs, that they consume what they have upon them, and find nothing but a Neapolitan favor for their labor (4).

Women were considered commodities for male consumption whose value diminished after they were used (Mendelson and Crawford 336) but a prostitute was also a disturbing element for the family and its budget (Fouassier-Tate 87) because she appropriated both single and married men's time ("inordinate desire"), reputation ("good name", "souls"), money ("impoverish your purses"), and health ("Neapolitan favor" was a synonym for syphilis (Partridge 743)). Prostitution did not always reduce women to the status of generic objects despite attempts towards their general standardisation by early modern authorities. It follows that the changing nature of the prostitute was bound to have an influence on the whole of society because they were an important part of early modern culture.

Shakespeare reminds us that if Falstaff's real-life fifteenth-century counterparts wanted to pay to have sex with a woman in the capital they would have known where to find one. Successive public statements had organised prostitution in zones. Henry II, for instance, had localised brothels by a 1162 ordinance in Southwark: prostitution fell under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester and was supervised by church authorities that tolerated the practice as a "necessary evil" (Shugg 292) since it was a preferable practice to the rape of virtuous wives and daughters (Bailey "Christian Thought" 162-163). Although prostitution was authorised within the bustling horse and cattle market area in Cock Lane, Smithfield, by the London enactment of 1393, there was still a strong urge to contain the phenomenon (Salisbury 154). Salgado observes how "all brothels had to be painted white and to carry a distinctive sign" (52) to mark prostitution as a stable and identifiable commerce. By the Renaissance, however, a marked rise in the number of prostitutes accompanied London's population that increased from an estimated 50,000 in 1530 to about 225,000 in 1605 (approximately 75,000 Londoners lived in the City and 115,000 lived in the lands known as the Liberties, so called because they were outside the city's restrictive regulatory zones (Bradley and Pevsner 57)).

The rise in the number of prostitutes could be explained by socio-economic factors, including the large number of beggars who could no longer be cared for after the 1535-1540 Dissolution of the Monasteries in the wake of Henry VIII's break from Rome (Randall 63). Young, single or poor women were increasingly vulnerable to sexual assault or exploitation in the countryside. The threat increased when they moved to cities if they could not obtain work as domestics, which meant they "received lodging, thus sparing an often uninformed or naïve young person from the potential hazards of living rough or falling prey to crime" (Lanza 285). Since many women did fall prey to prostitution, the arrangement between the Diocese and the Southwark brothels collapsed because the sheer number of prostitutes meant that attempts to market women as identifiable commodities was no longer possible.

The prostitute, essentially destined for male satisfaction with a recognised submissive role, thus became feared as a destabilising threat to the social order. This was initially because an increasing dread of syphilis developed along with the number of London's whores. John Stow's *A Survey of London* records how eighteen licensed *bordellos* of Southwark, well known "for the repaire of incontinent men to the like women" (331), were closed for health reasons as early as 1506. Only twelve re-opened (Stow "London" 332), which had the effect of "scattering the [remaining] prostitutes about London" (Shugg 293) and worsening the impression of chaos. Secondly, the stricter moral religious fervour of the 1520s Reformation also meant a practice the Catholic Church had formerly licensed was now increasingly prohibited (Smith "Old Blue Laws" 206-207) and the abolition of all licensed brothels in London eventually came with Henry VIII's 1546 proclamation (Hughes and Larkin 355-356).

Instead of resolving the problem, however, the legislation only further spread prostitution. Robert Crowley, in *One and thyrtye epigrammes* (1550), remarked that whores no longer permitted to ply their trade in brothels simply moved into taverns for security:

The bawdies of the stues  
Be turned all out  
But some think they inhabit,  
All England throughout  
In taverns and tiplyng houses,  
Many might be found (*One and thyrtye epigrammes* B ii).

The end of regulated Southwark brothels made supervision increasingly difficult (Shugg 306); the result was that prostitution, because it was no longer under control, could no longer be

contained. Faramerz Dbhoiwala remarks how the end of licensed brothels had an overall effect of confusing the boundaries between waged and unwaged sexual activities (106). Practices then considered reprehensible (adultery, fornication, extramarital cohabitation or mistress keeping) became harder to distinguish from prostitution. The outcome was socio-economic confusion that involved both the body and the budget.

As a result, prostitutes changed because they now participated in tavern activities traditionally held to be masculine. Opinion was thus directed towards whores as unnaturally mannish, which further gave the impression of a dangerous empowerment. Thomas Thomas, in his 1587 dictionary, records this virility, further defying Greene's claims of the whore as a simple commodity: "*Vīrōsus, a, um, à Vir, Lucil.* Desirous of or lusting after man, full of manly force, valiant as a man. *Virosa mulier, Lucill.* A stewed or arrant whore" (Q qq vi). The effect produced was that prostitutes, once accepted for their stable societal function as remunerated sexual outlet, now shared a conflated space in the collective imaginary with disorderly and dangerous men. Gilbert Walker, in *Diceplay* (1552), for example, pinions whores with tricksters set upon cheating the honest man of his hard-earned money. Scams included "crossbiting", where an unwitting client would be enticed into a tavern for a pint of wine only to find himself aggressed by the accomplice for attempting to corrupt an innocent woman and "only too glad to escape the bullying crossbiter by payment of forty shillings" (Shugg 301).

George Whetstone, in *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1584), reminds readers of how "a plain minded man using these deceitful houses, is an assured prey for all sorts of shifters" (D iii). The physical space of the whore's body became linked to general misdoers. The prohibition of prostitution had destroyed one of the power structures that underpinned early modern society and its collective order. Whetstone, for instance, confirms the disintegration by putting gambling or buying drinks in a public house on a level with prostitution:

The man that is enticed to be a Dicer, of his own accord will be a Whoremaster: [...] Gods blood, let's go, straight he cryeth, and with more haste, then good speed, they go to some blind brothel-house where [...] for a bottle or two of wine, the embracement of a painted Harlot, and the French Pockes for a reckoning, the Punie payeth forty shillings (Diii).

No wonder the ongoing early modern perspective on women as commodity was ambivalent. The redefinition of prostitution had caused the whore to be victimised or stigmatised – by her trade, by pamphleteers or by laws attempting to regulate her profession – at the same time she



remained a redoubtable physical and financial force to be reckoned with. Moreover, as Andrew Gurr notes, in documents such as William Harrison's "Description" of England, in his introduction to Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), "the only women who were acknowledged to be self-employed were whores" ("Playgoing" 64). This is a particularly remarkable fact in a society where women were held to be dependent on their fathers or husbands. It further implies that prostitutes commanded the potential to transfer, perturb and shape social norms more than they have often been given credit for because they were mediators on individual and collective levels.

The prostitute's once recognisable position as a simple sexual commodity contained within a brothel was destabilised. The topographical and socio-economic distance between prostitutes and clients, ruling classes and outcasts, were no longer disparate but congruent areas of experience and theatre suggested a close parity between these realms. The Shakespearean stage, because of its mass audience, had a wide-reaching cultural influence; amphitheatres such as the Globe held up to three thousand spectators at any one time (Gurr and Ichikawa "Shakespeare's Theatres" 3) and for a penny fee an apprentice bought as much theatre as Elizabeth I herself could buy (Gurr "Shakespearean Stage" 19). More significantly still, Shakespeare, through his characters, could express the changing nature of prostitution that appears to have influenced the entire structure of early modern society. In fact, a unilateral interpretation of prostitutes as simple exchange goods fails to consider several instances where we see female self-expression overcome male command. The distortion of gender relationships in Shakespeare, with men playing women, further points to a release of traditional perspectives on men, who can appear as embodied commodities, in an extreme version of what was becoming the unacknowledged norm. And yet, in under a century after Henry VIII's abolition of controlled prostitution, actors had overcome the connotation of commodity and claimed control under their own conditions.

### 4.3 Commodities and performance

HOSTESS QUICKLY     O Jesu, he doth it as like one of these harlotry players as ever I  
see (*1 Henry IV* 2.5.361)!

When praising what was probably William Kemp's acting (Streiman 165) as Falstaff performing Hal's father during a parody of a father and son exchange in the Boar's Head tavern, Hostess Quickly uses the adjective "harlotry" in an embedded reference to the early modern acting profession. In so doing, she points to a whole range of market exchange systems and financial compensation inspired by whoredom such as acting. Her lines make us think of the

geographical proximity, or even the direct implantation, of whores in the theatres bordering London but also of polemicists' criticisms of theatre as prostitution. Joseph Lenz notes that the analogy between players and whores was one that had been recognised since Plato's *Republic* because of the powerful seductive potential theatre had to subvert man's reason (833).

As Margareta de Grazia remarks, theatre is therefore an ideal framework for visualising and understanding early modern consumer culture, where "value is misrepresented as a relation between objects", since it is a place of double convertibility: a place where actors are transformed into other characters and where money is transformed into spectacle (18-19). It began with the Red Lion theatre in 1567 and the Theatre in 1576; both were built to the north of the city, as was the Curtain, in 1577; some companies still had to operate under the protection of a nobleman's or even Royal patronage in response to legislation that punished actors as prohibited vagrant beggars in the "Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds" (1572). Then the Bankside theatres to the south of the capital were built: the Rose in 1587, the Swan in 1595, and the Globe in 1599. The latter was one of a group of five theatres, the others being the Fortune, to the north, in 1600, to the east, the Boar's Head (formerly a tavern but converted into a theatre after the ban by authorities of theatrical performances in drinking places) in 1601, to the north-west, the Red Bull, in 1604, and, to the south, the Hope, in 1614, which had the dual function of a theatre and a place of bear baiting. The first theatres gradually began to attract a crowd of spectators away from the city of London towards the Liberties.

As was the case for prostitution, after a period of theatre being tolerated or even encouraged by those in power (such as the mystery play cycles performed during Catholic festivals), there came a strong legislative urge to limit it. This was again ostensibly for reasons of public health, as Lenz remarks: "Throughout the 1580s, the Lord Mayor repeatedly petitioned Elizabeth's government to discourage public plays as a means of curbing the danger of infection" (835) and plague epidemics also caused bans on playing (Gurr "Shakespearean Stage" 74). Over the period the dread of infection moved from "physical to moral corruption" (Lenz 836), however, with authorities fearing that, by attracting the masses away from church, theatre would destabilise and corrupt the social order (Howard "Stage" 27). The new theatres were thus contained socially, such as when one hundred and forty local residents petitioned to oppose the reconstruction of the Theatre in the wealthy inner London Blackfriars district, when the lease for the land it was originally built upon ran out in 1597 (Gurr and Ichikawa "Shakespeare's Theatres" 14). Early modern theatre also had to survive in difficult economic conditions since admission prices remained constant until the middle of the seventeenth century, unlike other market goods whose costs increased due to the increasing demands of a

rising population, the farming restrictions of enclosures, due to the reorganisation of large parts of rural England with the formation of large sheep farms and the confiscation of common land, and seven successive poor harvests (Briggs 30). London's emerging sex and show businesses were, therefore, also economically devalued because they had to vie for trade in an increasingly competitive context and offer their commodities to a wide spectrum of spectators – described by Andrew Gurr as a “homogeneous, all-inclusive social range from gallants to grooms and from citizen's wives to whores” (“Playgoing” 183).

When whores went freelance, in addition to taverns, they also haunted other places of “public amusement such as the Bear Garden and the Globe, Rose, Hope, and Swan playhouses” (Shugg 296), either for their own pleasure or to ply their custom. Further, there was also a close relationship between the early modern stage and prostitution because theatre owners were also often brothel proprietors. These included the notorious impresario, Philip Henslowe, who acquired the lease for the Little Rose, an “inn” in Southwark (one of the original Bankside stews) in 1585. Two years later, the partnership agreement for a theatre of the same name was signed, “to which the Little Rose lent its grounds, its name and, evidently its reputation” (Lenz 838). The Rose, where *1 Henry IV* was first performed in 1598, thus made material a mechanism of commodity in three ways: spectators paid for visual commodities of plays, they visualised prostitutes as commodities in them and may have consumed the services of sex workers in the audience. Philip Henslowe, like a pimp controlling his prostitutes, held players to their contract by keeping them perpetually in debt (Bailey “Of Bondage” 4-5) and was singled out, in the 1615 Articles of Oppression, for “having appropriated funds, stock and playbooks [or] binding hired men in his own name” (Bailey “Forms of Payback” 381); performing and prostitution, or simply visualising prostitution in performance, inescapably conjured up the idea of commodity. Unsurprisingly, Puritan sources made a pejorative assimilation of the play and the whorehouse. Philip Stubbes records, for instance, how audiences were corrupted by the “wanton gestures and bawdy speeches” (105) witnessed in plays.

If Stubbes' criticism was biased, his records nonetheless provide evidence of how theatre could be perceived “through prostitution seeking eyes because the eyes, quite naturally and reflexively, seek prostitution. That is, they are attracted by, submit to, and enjoy visual stimulation” (Lenz 840-841). As women characters were generally played by apprentice male actors, theatre was “caught in a double bind” (Lenz 841) because of its visual display of men for counterfeit erotic stimulation and because this duplicity of pretence was also marketed for profit. Acting under contract could indeed be conflated with harlotry and the “idea that male bodies were implicitly (or even explicitly) being objectified, just as women's bodies were, and

that this was happening precisely through the body of the boy actor” (Keinänen Personal communication).

However, early modern acting companies and their playwrights were able to turn around ideas of commodification thanks to enterprises such as the consortium that built the Globe. The consortium was made up of James Burbage’s two sons, Richard and Cuthbert, who owned fifty percent of the company; and William Shakespeare, Augustine Phillips, Thomas Pope, John Hemmings and William Kemp, who owned the other fifty percent (ten percent each). The theatre was thus owned by the actors and members of the Lord Chamberlain’s troupe (with the exception of Cuthbert Burbage). The shareholders held full ownership of the building; the non-shareholders of the company were liable for all production costs, including their own wages, in exchange for the use of the theatre. Although the collective theatre ownership model was in its infancy at the end of the sixteenth century, the cooperative enterprise was recognised by the State and its growing activities consolidated and covered costs as a stable and successful enterprise (Berry and Ingram 394). The new notions became part of the economic landscape to the point where actors who were not yet associated with the companies would come to demand their share. For example, in 1635 a petition called the “Sharers’ Papers” was written by Robert Benfield, Eliard Swanston and Thomas Pollard. They were already shareholders in the King’s Players company but wanted part of the profits another group of actor proprietors had divided among themselves. They asked for their money so that “the petitioners [...] might reap some better fruit of their labours than hitherto they have done, and be encouraged to proceed therein with cheerfulness” (Berry and Ingram 221).

Such examples oppose fixed categorisations of people as objects. In this account of literature on early modern prostitution and theatre, we have seen how the stage and sex businesses were not just parallel but actually overlapped. Actors and sex workers were officially contained in the same places and were bound by restrictive legislation that linked them, both morally, in the collective imagination, and in terms of contemporaneous commerce, or fact. Early modern society encouraged a network of legal contracts and cultural boundaries to constrain individual freedom but contrary to expectations and no doubt to the great displeasure of the city fathers and its Puritans, prostitutes and players could also testify to a certain degree of social dignity and financial independence as legislation also created a potential for cooperation and a certain collective well-being. Commodity could thus have the effect of making another voice heard: the voice of people who were traditionally objectified as we will see now thanks to the examples analysed on Shakespeare’s stage.

#### 4.4 According agency to staged commodities

While the theme of prostitution was not a new one, the *Henry IV* plays and *Pericles* offer a thought-provoking treatment of the brothel, principally owing to Shakespeare's treatment of prostitutes. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* observes that nearly all of Shakespeare's plays mention prostitution, though no more than five portray it explicitly and only two, *2 Henry IV* and *Pericles*, focus on women as sexual objects for sale within the context of a brothel (Dobson and Wells 359). As the first plays have been identified as the future Henry V's "coming of age story" (Kastan 5), and *Pericles* as a "shift from medieval to early modern conceptions of female transgression" (Hillman "Transgression" 15) the two plays could quite plausibly reveal other forms of conversion, such as characters giving the impression of changing from one form to another or the play's text and performance persuading audiences to change their perceptions of characters. Within brothel scenes this entails the consideration of a transfer of power from subject to object, in an inversion of the early modern hierarchy of self presided by God and then men, to whom women were subordinate. Francis Grose specifically defines commodity as a "woman's commodity: the private parts of a modest woman, and the public parts of a prostitute" (H1). Yet in these plays there is a movement of signifying systems that contests notions of women and their performers as subsumed into the status of generic objects and accords them agency instead.

Mistress Nell Quickly, the hostess of the Boar's Head tavern, is an embodiment of such adjustment. Helge Kökeritz posits that her name would have been pronounced "quick lie" (242) and she is indeed adept at rapidly switching from one position to another. She is a tavern bawd in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, wife to Pistol in *Henry V* and one of Doctor Caius's domestic servants and arbitrator for Mistresses Ford and Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597-1601), thus taking up functions and going places whores were not supposed to go. Her challenge to authority upon her person also includes movement from a consumable object to that of provider. In *1 Henry IV* she states: "Thou or any man knows where to have me" (3.3.117-18), mingling comedy and seriousness with the wordplay on "know" in its carnal sense. At the same time, she exhibits the capacity to withhold her sexual services ("you do not know me"), when she challenges Falstaff for not paying his debts for other everyday consumer objects:

HOSTESS No, Sir John, you do not know me, Sir John; I know you, Sir John. You owe me money, [...] I bought you a dozen of shirts to your back. [...] You owe money here besides, Sir John: for your diet and by-drinkings, and money lent you, four- and twenty pound (*1 Henry IV* 3.3.57-65).

The scene's tavern setting, moreover, underscores the equivocal characteristics of prostitution, where authorities were intent on preserving the outward morality of male customers despite the dissolute commerce of women. Quickly is sexually exploited by Falstaff in the same way he exploits her generosity concerning clothes or food; she is shown to be a victim in both cases and neither obtains recompense nor respect for her pains. Her staged words evoke the early modern treatment of women; the staging of Falstaff's misuse of power triggers a movement of thought towards the significance of whores from simple objects of male pleasure towards consumers ("I bought you") or contributors ("you owe me money") themselves, especially as "know" rhymes with "owe" to suggest that Falstaff should acknowledge Quickly as a person as well as pay her for her services as a prostitute. Shakespeare's representation of Quickly clearly reinstates the right to self-expression as well as establishing the centrality of gender issues rather than simply market-orientated ones in this instance. The brothel is a central motif composed of elements that would have been plausible to Shakespeare's audiences. The closed brothel setting thus paradoxically showcases rather than prevents the public detecting what is manifest.

In 2 *Henry IV* Quickly continues to assume a position of feminine self rather than simply a commodity to be exchanged between the male customers who are willing to pay for her; she attempts to have Falstaff arrested for his debts and dishonest marriage proposal to her and hence claims the position of subject over a knight far above her in degree. If it is Quickly who is arrested in Act 5, scene 4 (she is scapegoated for the physical violence that caused the death of a man in a crossbiting incident), the parish officers' callous promise of physical punishment for another's misdemeanours amplifies awareness of Hostess Quickly's attempts to impose her own distinctiveness despite everything. Moreover, dramatically, the character is shown to be more than a negative stereotype because she is "given the job of revealing Falstaff's death in Act 2, scene 3 of *Henry V* so her importance in telling Falstaff's tale is considerable" (Keinänen Personal communication). The announcement of the demise of one of the Henriad's most popular figures is performed from not only a female but from a prostitute's perspective to suggest that Shakespeare's, if not a resolutely feminist theatre, can be said to hold up a mirror to the world from a female standpoint at least from time to time. His was, however, a portrait that represents not only exploitation but also the transference of correspondence from commodity and the prostitute to commodity and her client.



#### 4.5 Commodity appropriating its own agency

The introductory relation between Quickly's performance and commodity leads us on to what may seem, at first glance, to be a more tenuous link between two of Shakespeare's other female characters. If a relative treatment of women as exchange objects in both the *Henriad* and *Pericles* has been given little scholarly attention, this is probably because scholars see the subject matter of the Romances as too far removed from the prosaic Southwark tavern. Steven Mullaney in *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (1988) develops connections between Marina's "performance" and the player/prostitute with the idea that reproducing the dominant dynamics of a given culture does not necessarily reinforce those dynamics (132). More recently, Gordon McMullan takes a broader view of the romance pattern as a "detached hieratic stance [...] beyond the quotidian world [...] a point of access to essence, a way to move beyond actuality to archetype" (31), suggesting that the genre transcends historical or contemporary considerations. If over fifteen years separate the creation of the *Henry IV* plays and *Pericles*, the plays nonetheless suggest that people considered commodities should be allowed a place in society as individuals. This is especially true in the plays' respective brothel scenes (2.4 and 19) considering the characters of Falstaff's mistress, Doll Tearsheet and Marina, the daughter of Pericles, Prince of Tyre. Doll Tearsheet is "Shakespeare's only character to call herself a 'whore' without disowning the term" (Dobson and Wells 359), whom Quickly has Falstaff first meet at supper (2 *Henry IV* 2.1.48-49). Marina is abducted by pirates and trafficked to the proprietors of a bawdy house. The connections involve how the characters speak, act, and how they are represented.

Doll Tearsheet's name, like Mistress Quickly's, is an efficient pointer to her profession. Doll, notes Jean E. Howard, was a common term for prostitute, and Tearsheet "graphically suggests one consequence of unrestrained fornication" ("Norton Shakespeare" 1351, 1321). As Helge Kokeritz has pointed out, however, "'tear sheet' was also in common use in the sixteenth century as in the sense 'sheet of the best quality' (243), suggesting she may have been exclusive merchandise. This is confirmed since her commerce proves more rewarding than Quickly's. Mention is made, for instance, of her buying costly items such as a starched 'ruff' (2.4.113,120), a costly clothing accessory of the Elizabethan period and thus an anachronistic reference, since the plays were situated during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). In *Pericles*, Marina is also a luxurious item. Dionyza, wife to Cleon, resolves to have the now beautiful woman Pericles entrusted her with as a baby in Tharsus (scene 13) executed by Leonine. The order is given not only out of envy but also to augment Dionyza's daughter's chances of a profitable marriage (scene 15). The Chorus embodied by the character of the poet



John Gower (c. 1325-1408), whose *Confessio Amantis* (1390-1393) Shakespeare drew upon to write the play, accordingly expresses the reasons for Dionyza's jealousy in terms of financial responsibility and payback: "Marina gets / All praises which are paid as debts, / and not as given" (15.33-35).

Further, like Doll's activities, Marina's capture and peddling as a prostitute is grounded in reality. Wallace Shugg explains how: "If the wives or daughters of needy citizens would not be corrupted, the procuress would meet the carriers who brought young innocent girls to London looking for work" (296) and bawds would send enrollers out into the countryside to pressgang new sex workers. This is probably why, in scene 16 of *Pericles*, the Pander, and his wife, the Bawd, discuss female commodity in terms of commercial coercion. Their current stock of three venereal disease-ridden prostitutes is insufficient to make a decent living from (16.1.6-7), and their raising of eleven bastards – and bringing them to prostitution when they turned eleven – has also proved an inadequate market strategy (16.1.12-14). Consequently, when their servant, Boulton, purchases Marina from pirates (16.1.45), the Bawd expresses her intention to obtain the maximum return by putting Marina's maidenhead up for sale to the highest bidder:

BAWD      Boulton, take you the marks of her, the colour of her hair, complexion, height, age, with warrant of her virginity; and cry 'He that will give most shall have her first'. Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing, if men were as they have been. Get this done as I command you (*Pericles* 16.50-54).

As Suzanne Gossett remarks, as "Marina is an expensive purchase" (327), the Bawd advises her to obtain gold and good opinion to reimburse the investment: "Mark me, you must seem to do that fearfully which you commit willingly, to despise profit where you have most gain" (16.101-104). The Bawd posits that the cultural value of innocence can be substituted by money.

Nonetheless, the performance of Doll and Marina seems to resist submission and impose self through their command of agency. Doll's language, for instance, has value; it shows her adeptness in managing dissolute customers such as the blustering Pistol, a "cutpurse rascal [...] filthy bung" (2.4.107), or the more worthwhile flattering of Falstaff: "I kiss thee with a constant heart [...] I love thee better than I love e'er a scurvy young boy of them all" (2.4.241-245). Doll may have been a recognisable commodity sitting on Falstaff's knee (2.4.203-252), and yet she both contains physical danger (Pistol) and gains lucrative custom (Falstaff). Shakespeare's representation of Doll defies stereotypical depictions of prostitutes such as Lucas Cranach the

Elder's *circa* 1530 "An ill-matched Pair", an emblematic warning against marketable affection depicting a young girl with an impassive face tickling an ugly old man's beard whilst he smirks lewdly and holds out a necklace in his right hand to recompense her services (Cranach). The brothel in Shakespeare, like Cranach's portrait, is a visible symbol of the degradation of the social nexus of society. Unlike the portrait, however, the brothel is used as a powerful theatrical conceit to prompt recognition of how people could at times resist objectification.

Similarly, if one of the fundamental issues in *Pericles* is a "blurring of gifts and trade [that] is particularly evident where women are involved" (Gossett 327), Marina manages never to go as far as the "sexual slippage between giving and selling" (Gossett 150); Marina defies commodification by pointedly naming activities associated with prostitution without ever prostituting herself. For instance, the town governor Lysimachus' cash and admiration for Marina is given to Boult without loss of Marina's maidenhead. Instead, she substitutes other "virtues" for his money: "Proclaim that I can sing, weave, sew, and dance, / With other virtues, which I'll keep from boast, / And I will undertake all these to teach" (19.194-196). The princess associates herself with prostitutes, seen as objects of entertainment ("sing", "dance") and who also often worked part-time as seamstresses (Dobson and Wells 359). Quickly's unintentionally lewd comments in *Henry V* reveal the commonplace, "for we cannot lodge and board a dozen or fourteen gentlewomen that live honestly by the prick of their needles, but it will be thought we keep a bawdy house straight" (2.1.28-31). Here, by blurring boundaries between activities traditionally associated with prostitution and others considered more virtuous, Marina upsets her own classification as commodity; she designates herself as part of a group her staged words intend to fight and succeeds in doing so. Besides, that a boy actor would have performed the princess challenges the early modern logic of both gender and identity; the actor and the character thus doubly transgress their authorised station and refuse attempts to contain their identity as commodity.

#### **4.6 Conserving agency beyond containment**

The capacity of the player-as-prostitute to enable audiences to visualise early modern empowerment, through the consumption of the visual commodity of plays, continues even when agency seems definitively contained. Outside the tavern at the end of 2 *Henry IV*, for instance, Doll's language still challenges endeavours to stifle her agency. She attempts to avoid punishment for involvement in the murder of the tavern customer by claiming she is pregnant and demanding the parish officers allow her clemency until she gives birth, as was permitted in early modern law (Edgar 207): "I'll tell thee what, thou damned tripe-visaged rascal, an the

child I go with do miscarry, thou wert better thou hadst struck thy mother” (5.4.7-10). Ostensibly her plan does “miscarry” because she is simply disposed of; in Pistol’s terms, she is removed “in base durance and contagious prison” (5.5.32) and shamed by obscurity. In the early modern culture of commodity, Doll is trapped in the artificial society of the brothel, forced to view the world through the mirror of her male clients. When she breaks from her bonds she is condemned to die in prison.

In *Henry V*, Pistol, who has now married Quickly, mentions Doll’s death from venereal disease and her life as a whore. He does so through association with Cressida, who was the unfaithful lover of Troilus in classical legend and a traditional symbol of female inconstancy and who, by the early modern period, was held to suffer from leprosy for her unfaithfulness (Muir 141). Moreover, he also gives a reference to an overriding early modern conception of prostitutes as unhealthy predators, since “lazar” meant leprous and “kite” signified both bird of prey and prostitute (Bate and Rasmussen 43): “No, to the spital go, / And from the powd’ring tub of infamy / Fetch forth the lazar kite of Cressid’s kind, / Doll Tearsheet” (2.1.67-70). At the same time, Shakespeare, through reference to Cressida, underlines the fact that Doll is a literary creation, and should be regarded as such. He could be attempting to detract from the pathos of her death or use her character as a foil to Prince Hal’s choice of coming face to face with the reality of his ancestry or cultivating a Machiavellian form of command. As we will see in Chapter Eight, *Henry V* shows how Henry elects to ignore recognition of hereditary reality and decides upon the latter.

The connection between two closed-in contexts, brothel and prison, clearly suggests whores must be contained to ensure the absolute submission of the prostitute’s body to socially endorsed consumption. In early modern England, after 1553, prostitutes were sent to the prison known as Bridewell (a former royal palace given by Edward VI to the city) to dissuade, punish and set them to work in an attempt to make them useful to society. However, if the geographically positioned house of correction had replaced London’s houses of ill repute, the suppression of brothels and the creation of institutions did nothing to diminish prostitution. Even deporting prostitutes from Bridewell to Virginia, as of 1618, to supposedly prevent the propagation of syphilis and reassure the local community, failed to reduce their influence (Fouassier-Tate 83). Audiences would have, moreover, perhaps understood the significant irony of placing dissolute prostitutes in former royal palaces or deporting them to colonies named after the “Virgin Queen” for society’s protection.

Shakespeare goes further in blurring the distinctions within society. His ability to acknowledge new forms of commodity anticipates the world of later plays, where nearly

everyone is engaged in some form of objectification. In fact, as Isabella in Middleton's *The Changeling* (1622) observes: "Madmen and fools are a staple commodity" (3.4.257); in this play, the chief characters seek to impose their wills in an indifferent world, where, as Alibius notes "we must eat, wear clothes and live" (3.4. 258) and victimising others becomes the unbending mercantilist norm. Shakespeare anticipates how mercantile hypocrisy fosters the paradigm by portraying Prince Hal and Lysimachus as a form of commodity, while it would seem that Shakespeare's sympathies go to the female characters. After all, Machiavellian financial contracts, rather than friendship or familial ties, bind the men as much as their female victims "to a system of commodities" (Hodge 18). By suggesting that commodity is an essential part of early modern existence, therefore, the brothel scenes in *Henry IV* and *Pericles* critique Machiavellian politics from both political and commercial angles and explore the consequences of the reduction of human relationships that "emerge from texts such as Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) that came to the English stage via Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1592)" (Drakakis Personal communication). Indeed, it is a character based on Machiavelli that opens Marlowe's play about amoral power struggles in closed-in spaces and the bias of expediency governs male concerns. All in all, in Shakespeare, men too serve to enlighten audiences to how the cash nexus had supplanted the social nexus of early modern England, whether this be through the complex character of Prince Hal or the more unambiguously Machiavellian Lysimachus, as shown next.

#### **4.7 Commodified brothel customers**

The brothel scenes particularly illuminate Prince Hal and Lysimachus' discreditable conduct. What is further troubling about Prince Hal's divided personality is that it suggests that the experience of commodity is far from unique or simply female. This all points to their artificiality as a creation, and provides an illustration of the basic tenets Shakespeare propounded in *King John* that commodity and ethics belong henceforth to different spheres of thought and judgement. We also have to consider that Prince Hal's case especially involves not one person but two, thanks to the staged relationship between himself and his tavern companion, Falstaff. Falstaff reveals Hal's culture and crude violence, suggesting a close parity between the two. Shakespeare makes this clear, for example, in the final exchange in *1 Henry IV* between Hal and Falstaff, where they compete for the glory and profit of Percy's death in market vocabulary ("gild", "terms") that clearly combines metaphor and realism on Hal's behalf: "For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have" (5.4.151-152), or when Falstaff mocks honour to the extent of comparing it to a puff of wind: "What is honour?"

A word. What is that word? Air” (5.1.133-134). If Falstaff conceives of profit in terms of “good names” or “warm slaves”, for Hal, as Lars Engle observes, honour is also a “commodity which, like money, can move all at once from one persons’ possession to another’s” (111). Henry IV’s guilty past of usurping Richard II’s throne and dividing the Body politic becomes Prince Hal’s guilty present and perhaps explains his dual existence, where he performs, as does Lysimachus, the reckless relishing of a shady lifestyle whilst escaping its consequences.

Moreover, Hal’s language establishes kingly identity both as part of a framework of commercial exchange and a drama of prostitution, “a metaphor for the behaviour of those historical figures in the play for whom selling themselves or screwing others, had become a political fact of life” (Bulman 75). Commodity in the *Henriad* is thus “admirable in the way it maximizes circulation” (Rosenthal 111), especially in its capacity to interweave the factors of identity and gender associated with interests that honour the prostitute and commodify the prince. For instance, as Shakespeare positions Quickly and Tearsheet’s arrest and removal from the streets of London just after the coronation of Henry V, he points to wider notions pertaining to “familiar metaphors of the well-ordered body or the patriarchal family” (Kastan 41), and suggests the whole of early modern society had become a cash nexus. The powerful matriarch, like the prostitute, is a symbol of potential disorder in the *Henriad*, whose opening lines pointedly establish England as the personification of a cannibalistic mother state: “No more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children’s blood” (*1 Henry IV* 1.1.5-6). Both seem subdued upon Henry’s coronation, yet the prince’s close physical and linguistic proximity to Falstaff and the Stews belie a clear distinction between the prince and the prostitute, even when the latter has been confined to prison. The result is that the state is deprived of its conventional glorification and seems commodified while the whore is honoured, both as a victim and as a person in her own right.

Furthermore, Prince Hal’s repudiation of Falstaff before he attains the throne in *2 Henry IV* is performed using the lexis of commodity (“thing”) and performance (“shall the world perceive”): “Presume not that I am the thing I was, / For God doth know, so shall the world perceive, / That I have turned away my former self; / So will I lose those who kept me company” (5.5.54-57). Following Sandra Fischer, we can say that, within the *Henriad*, characters “habitually appropriate economic language [...] to abandon feudalism and to accept a different economic construct of reality” (Fischer 124). Here too though, Prince Hal’s character remains haunted by ancestral legacies as much as he is motivated by his personal vanity. Beneath the face of his character was the face of the actor playing his character, who perhaps also played the character of Henry IV. This historic and dramatic heredity plays a crucial role when, for

example, the play (itself an object of trade) particularly appropriates official systems of meaning to give a new, more positive image of characters such as Quickly, and subvert the superiority and abuse of power of her clients such as Falstaff or the future king, Prince Hal.

Shakespeare treats Marina's client/suitor Lysimachus in a similar manner. Spectators would have perceived her exemption from commerce in the Mytilene brothel as increasing her marital value as a virtuous bride. Nonetheless, the structure of the Pander and his wife, the bawd, dealing their surrogate daughter parallels that of the early modern family unit aiming to marry their daughter, which suggests that the traditional early modern marriage market was just as degrading. As Jeanie Grant More remarks: "Marina's virginity is the commodity that brings a high price on either market, prostitution or marriage" (41). Lysimachus anticipates the sale in his bid to tempt her to prostitution: "A piece of gold for thy virginity; / Here's twenty to relieve thine honesty" (19.126-26). Later, in the recognition scene, Pericles identifies Marina in terms of precious ornaments ("jewel-like") and emphasises the commerce of his daughter through association with Marina's mother who would have similarly been sold by dowry into marriage ("cased as richly"): "My dearest wife was like this maid, and such / My daughter might have been [...] Her stature to an inch, as wand-like straight, / As silver-voiced, her eyes as jewel-like, / And cased as richly" (21.95-99). Likewise, Pericles promises Marina to Lysimachus in financial terms, if it is accepted that there is wordplay on "noble", a coin "worth 6s. 8d. (a third of a pound and half a mark) and the principle high-value coin from 1351 to 1464" (Cook 39): "You shall prevail, were it to woo my daughter, / For it seems you have been noble towards her" (21.245-6). Shakespeare shows how, if the dowry practice was merely a continuation of patriarchal domination from the medieval era, Marina's negotiation can be perceived as particularly commercial because it follows immediately from the brothel episode and is in stark contrast with the romantic genre of the play.

Moreover, as Lysimachus's true character is exposed in the plot as a disreputable frequenter of brothels and a fortune-hunter, his capacities as administrator, both of his household and as governor of Mytilene are clearly called into question on a moral basis. The future bridegroom considers Marina as "unworthy of him until he knows she is a princess [21.56-68]"; he only seems "noble" when he really is "shallow, if not opportunistic" (More 42). For that reason, if Lysimachus and Pericles figure Marina as a mere object, their contempt for her as a person does nothing to encourage audience sympathy to their cause. On the contrary, just as Nell Quickly's autonomy is only superficially bound as she transfers from tavern to prison, Marina's dependence is disputable because the nobility of those in control is clearly dishonoured, either in the closed space of the whorehouse or the confines of the household. In *2 Henry IV*, spectators



see less of Hal behaving riotously (he does not appear until Act 2) and Warwick promises Henry IV that the prince will “in the perfectness of time / Cast off his followers [...] Turning past evils to advantages” (4.3.74-78). This promise is carried out when Hal publicly rejects Falstaff (5.5.45), so ostensibly dispelling all speculation about the future king’s relationship with the knight. *Pericles*, however, is even less ambiguous, there is no public rejection of a disreputable companion. As a consequence, commodities, such as the ostensible mention of jewels and coins, have increasingly important potential significance. The most important significance is that the commodity has clearly become the ideal and provides a mask for humanity.

Lysimachus’ adoration of the chaste has become a quest for commodity, an idolatry which is itself the physical manifestation of a romantic ideal. As such, if the use of the jewels refutes any notions of incest between Pericles and his daughter, they also avoid any risk of revealing any “romantic” attachment between Lysimachus and Marina. More widely, analysis of the unprincipled Lysimachus uncannily resembles A. R. Braunmuller’s of Prince Hal’s character (“realpolitik and the immoral arrogance of deadly choplogic” 307) to suggest that Shakespeare’s sympathy goes to characters usually visualised as “commodities”, whether this be in the *Henriad*, traditionally held to concern historical and governmental considerations, or in plays such as *Pericles*, considered to contribute to the romance genre.

#### 4.8 Conclusion

PANDER O, our credit comes not in like the commodity, nor the commodity wages not with the danger (*Pericles* 16.26-27).

The conceit of the brothel may be the vehicle for a plot device, the repository of memory, a metaphor or mask for commodity but it is also art in relation to life and conduct and to its correct interpretations. Eric Partridge’s etymological reading of commodity here as a slang derivative of “the female pudend” (142) encapsulates Shakespeare’s staging of the workings of the brothel in the *Henriad* and in *Pericles*. The Pander’s choice of vocabulary pointing to merchandise (“commodity”) in exchange for capital (“credit” and “wages”) could also denote the consumption of the visual commodities of plays and the performance of players in them. As we have seen, both undercut the control afforded to the client by according the power of transformation to the object: Mistress Quickly decrees her own rights as a consumer, imposes a female point of view and, when viewed as part of a gendered diptych, presents a moralising complement that illuminates Falstaff and Hal’s discreditable conduct. Doll is a simple prostitute, the most banal of characters, yet thanks to Shakespeare’s choice of her name, the



language she uses and her performance in the situations she is placed in, she is allowed to become a person in her own right.

Commodity, usually thought of in terms of object only, is also a privileged space within which to shape the self whilst commenting on the crude mercantilist reality of unscrupulous customers. In this way, at least on Shakespeare's stage, the new commodity market can potentially be seen to favour the development of the female self by challenging abuses of male power that have here been represented by the brothel scenes in *Henry IV* and *Pericles*. How the shift in power is further made visible through the representation of women occupying male space in the theatre is seen in Chapter Five.

- **CHAPTER FIVE: COMMODITY AND THEATRICAL SPACE FOR WOMEN**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Above I discussed how Shakespeare's depiction of women in brothels complicates early modern notions of prostitutes and players as commodity, by showing how both were able to resist objectification and exert a certain amount of agency. Elsewhere, Shakespeare further challenges the commodification of women through the way he positions them onstage. In this chapter, I analyse how, thanks to his strategic horizontal and vertical use of stage space, along with his use of stage props/commodities (including costume) associated with women, Shakespeare shows how female characters transcend commodification while men are increasingly objectified. To do so, I study woman-as-commodity in horizontal space in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The issue is further explored thanks to reference to *The Tamer Tamed* (c. 1604) and *Epicene* (1609). I then examine the question of commodity and vertical stage space in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Above all, this chapter makes clear that commodity was increasingly subject to disorder, so that it was no longer certain that men could escape from their own objectification. Male characters seem, at worst, commodified, or at best, submissive dupes to commodity themselves: they are either their own victims of commodity desire or gulls to commodity scams in spaces they were supposed to control.

Admittedly, space was strictly controlled to uphold a male-dominated hierarchy in early modern England. Women were confined to a domestic space that allowed men to play the public role abroad whilst their officially-held physical and moral inferiors stayed at home. Space served as support and symbol of patriarchy: the publicly-staged father or husband celebrated his power through the imprisoned female body, reducing women to objects. When Thomas Edgar, in his seminal work, *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights*, remarks: "Women have no voice in Parliament, They make no Lawes, they consent to none. They abrogate none. All of them are understood either married or to be married and their desires are subject to their husband" (6), he is providing a useful clarification as to what would have been the objectified female condition of the period. As a result, most marriages were born of calculation rather than commitment, and men often married for gain rather than for love. Shakespeare's plays are a valuable historical record of how women nonetheless negotiated marital space and resisted an imposed status as commodities, supplementing surviving historical sources and showing how female characters exerted influence from the inside. The issue at stake is how women are shown to resist patriarchy despite subjugation, to the extent that they conquer male-dominated work and social spaces.

In early modern theatre, female characters conventionally functioned as staged objects alongside the male characters who officially had more agency. Paradoxically, however, tangible stage properties enabled fictional women to challenge female commodification. Moreover, recent analysis shows how the sparse or non-existent scenery of the Renaissance stage would have acted as a foil to give stage properties a remarkably important status by present-day standards. Scholars such as Andrew Sofer have argued that the prop's impact upon audiences would have been more than that of a complement to semiotic analysis, as was suggested by Bert O. States or Stanton B. Garner. As such, he follows on from scholars such as David Bevington, Felix Bosonnet, or Ann Slater, who see the stage object as an important part of the Shakespearean vocabulary. Sofer observes how props are not simply emblems but concrete entities "mediated both by the gestures of the individual actor who handles the object and by the horizon of interpretation available to historically spectators at a given time" (61). Sofer pays less attention to the ways female agency is constructed through their association with objects in the early modern period (he addresses the issue after the Restoration, when he examines the issue of women actresses as "subjects" or "objects" (131)). Other critics such as Arjun Appadurai or Lena Cowen Orlin, however, argue that an understanding of the use, circulation and signification of early modern objects provides a way to reconstruct Elizabethan and early Stuart society, where married women were often little more than legal prostitutes. Accordingly, I now aim to discover if Shakespeare's use and circulation and of female characters, props or costume could circumvent ideas of female commodification on the Shakespearean stage. Could ideas, such as those of the Puritan-educated author Daniel Defoe's and voiced as "Conjugal Lewdness or Matrimonial Whoredom" in his *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (1727), be strategically undermined? To answer this question, I begin with some historical information demonstrating how space and commodity are linked, since to understand early modern female space we also need to understand Shakespeare's female characters as commodity.

## **5.2 Early modern female space**

Home was the officially endorsed space for early modern women; as Amanda Flather notes, women were considered physically and intellectually "unsuited to activities outside it" (17). Space was organised in an ideological framework that guaranteed women's submission. Within such a structure, once "space has been bounded and shaped, it is no longer a neutral background; it exerts its own influence" (Ardener 12). Indeed, space was an "arena of social action" (Flather 2), and conceptualised in terms of cultural dimensions mediated by people,

objects and activities. In particular, since space was constructed around early modern men, this meant that gender differences were constantly paraded and reasserted. It was nearly always men who were in the public eye, whereas women in enclosed spaces were generally assumed to be “passive victims of absolute male dominance” (Flather 4).

Shakespeare’s contemporaries lived enclosed in a set of conventions about man’s place in the universe that began when Christian thinkers first grafted the theological concept of God’s governance of the world (divine providence) onto the ancient Greek idea of the universe that placed the earth, and hence man, at its centre and imagined that the planets and the other heavenly bodies moved around the earth and man in spheres. Man was no longer a dot in an infinite, impersonal and chaotic universe but rather the heart of the planetary system and affected by the movements of the planets around him. Moreover, man was considered the principal reason for the creation of the universe in the first place. In this way, to account for the existence of evil, political disorder and natural disasters and also to provide for man’s free will, a distinction was made between the life of man on earth subject to the capriciousness of fortune and the greater (coherent, orderly, immutable) world above, whose boundary was the moon, which was both beautiful and eternal.

The most notable exception to public space being reserved for men was the free circulation of whores. As Andrew Gurr notes in *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, this was largely due to the fact that they were “the only women who were acknowledged to be self-employed” (64) in early modern England. Since women, not men, were blamed for illicit sex (Gowing 2) during the period, however, the whore’s public existence and sexual subservience to her male clients could have reinforced rather than diminished conventionally held concepts of visible patriarchal power. Even so, Shakespeare shows the woman-as-object as capable of simultaneously embodying and denying her commodified status. He shows how women resist the assumed set of beliefs through their empowered occupation of stage space and clever use of stage commodities; at the same time, men are represented as increasingly objectified. Even before the advent of a spatial division of labour that would increasingly separate the home and the workplace by the end of the seventeenth century, women could thus be seen to wield some power from the inside. In the domestic space that historians such as Keith Wrightson have seen as economically overlapping, women who were both morally and legally contained could at least experience a partly active role in society because they were just as responsible for the family budget as were their husbands. Wrightson, commenting on seasonal farm employment or the population mobility of the period, records how labourers’ wives obtained day contracts (42) or single women as servants moved into the cities (50). He also observes how young

women of humble birth “interacted daily with their masters and mistresses” (72), bearing witness to class and age relations and interaction at all levels of society.

As such, following Foucault’s concept of “heterotopology” (“Spaces” 3), space was already more than merely restrictive because it also gave room to express power – figurative as well as literal. Theatrical female space can be seen, then as now, as “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault “Spaces” 6). With reference to the assumption of absolute early modern patriarchy, the reclaiming of agency by early modern women could thus challenge both the notion of men as the head of the household or even suggest male commodification. The visibly-mastered quality of the early modern female that was vital to male dominance could hence be destabilised in spaces that were traditionally considered subdued ones, and male efforts to mark early modern women as uniformly passive and submissive proved to be in vain. Contemporary audiences would have without doubt understood the ambiguities essential to space as an official inscription of male power, and could thus have given their own interpretation to the performance of early modern women as objects on stage.

### **5.3 Space and commodity on Shakespeare’s stage**

The use of early modern stage space to convey notions of property in Shakespeare has become particularly important to early modern scholars. Academics have borrowed from the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who argued for the social production of meaning through space and especially the political use of ever-expanding urban space as a tool for control and domination. For instance, Henry S. Turner’s idea of the theatrical device of the map in *King Lear* to connect notions of space, private, public property and authority is informed by Lefebvre’s idea that natural space was “irreversibly gone. [Thus] nature [was] now reduced to materials on which society’s productive forces operate” (“Renaissance Stage” 286). Turner accordingly notes how early modern theatre provided both what Lefebvre called “representational space” and “representation of space” to reveal how, in *King Lear*, the replacement of natural order could be “projected outward and idealized, abstracted into a thing that could be occupied, used up, or converted into a commodified form” (“Renaissance Stage” 170, 188). Moreover, informed by the dynamic model of cultural production (theatrical space symbolising social space) theorised by scholars such as Steven Mullaney, Jean-Christophe Agnew and Douglas Bruster, Turner suggests that the space in London’s theatres, thanks to their own urban and semi-autonomous (institutional and entrepreneurial) status was particularly well suited to the “epistemological project of social analysis” (“Renaissance Stage” 29) of early

modern England. Turner notes how London's theatres allowed "objects, actions and bodies [to] exceed themselves to become ostensive, performative signs of something else" ("Renaissance Stage" 26) in that the actor's body was "projected onto the character's body, projected onto the connotations, associations, and ideas of the body furnished by the spectator and his or her culture, whether fictional, symbolic, discursive, or ideological" (29). As such, the actor's body positioned in different stage spaces would just as equally produce different forms of social meaning. These spaces customarily included concepts of "horizontal" and "verticality": for example, men going out to earn a living in the new mercantile world or moving "up" and "down" in society.

The female body in these spaces, through the workings of the frame of the male gaze, was officially rearranged in a way that fulfilled emphasis on patriarchal possession, often as a mere object, not to be owned permanently but by whoever was holding her at the different stages of her existence. Thomas Edgar frames these different stages of a woman's enclosed life by both church and state when he notes that "a Woman hath divers speciall ages, at the 7. yeare of her age, her father shall have aide of his tenant to marry her. [...] At 14. to bee *hors du guard*: at 16. to be past the Lords tender of a husband" (7). Canon law also privileged boys over girls regarding marital age of consent (twelve for boys, seven for girls) rather than English law (twelve for both, even if a child could dissent until fourteen). Further, from a very early age, girls were considered little more than sexualised objects and their status as commodities was reinforced due to their encoded and contained spatial boundaries. It seems appropriate, therefore, to extend the notion of the "male gaze" that is normally associated with Laura Mulvey, through film studies, to a consideration of the early modern conditions that are being centrally considered. Mulvey notes how:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze fixes its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance encoded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle [...] she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire (19).

Mulvey concludes that the "image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man" reinforces the ideology of the patriarchal order and encourages the circumvention of male castration anxiety by fixing woman in the status of a stable object, fetish, or artefact to be

contemplated by men (25-26). Transposing her ideas to the Shakespearean stage, it can be postulated that the visual aspect of female characters as objects was underpinned by interpretations of women in terms of commercial display within male-dominated spaces. Shakespeare, however, often revived these pre-established concepts so that women too could assert self-appropriation in a confrontation between convention and modernisation and even despite being “sold” in marriage. The perceived connection between women and commodity was thus a paradigm that looked back to the past and forward to a future where women could create alternative identities to those that had been decided for them. Shakespeare’s theatre provides a space where female characters could establish links between custom and modernity, blending behavioural styles and commodities to move away from generally accepted cultural norms.

Keir Elam argues for such theatrical production of meaning in society. This is what he qualifies as a “performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it” (2). Similarly, Joanne Tompkins borrows from Foucault to isolate and examine space in performance. For Tompkins theatre is also “a location that, when apparent in performance, reflects or comments on a site in the actual world, a relationship that may [...] act as a foil to how we understand spaces and structures beyond a performance” (1) and thus helps us to understand how cultural and political meanings can be produced spatially. Tompkins also follows on from Anne Ubersfeld, who posits that the “stage locus always represents something [especially] the image people have of spatial relationships and the conflicts underlying those relationships in the society in which they live” (97). From a feminist perspective, Hanna Scolnicov sees interaction between theatrical and existential space as that of the relationship between art and life and notes that gender roles are “spatially defined in relation to the inside and the outside of the house. [...] Seeing the within and the without in terms of the outdoors and the indoors immediately transforms the theatrical space into a gender-charged environment” (6-7), where the question of space thus becomes the question of woman.

The encoded and contained spatial boundaries around women may have been reinforced upon the early modern stage due to the fact that female characters were constrained within male bodies. Leslie Ferris has described how the fact that men played women’s roles on the early modern stage “created the notion of woman as a sign, a symbolic object manipulated and controlled artistically by male playwrights and male actors” (xi). Penny Gay notes, in connection with Shakespeare’s comedies, however, that they do afford the possibility of assuming power, whatever the containing outcome of the plot (normally marriage). Her analysis



concentrates on cross-dressing or sexual transgression, what she calls the “pleasure of the actor’s multi-gendered presence” (15) that may not be systematically and “finally contained by the narrative’s movement towards incorporation” (178). Interaction between women and commodity clearly comes to light through a close examination of the comedies, where desire is nearly always revealed to be of consumerist sort; after all, the dowry payment required for every early modern marriage reinforced the bond between acquisitive dynamics and ownership, involving women, in early modern texts. While women characters were stage-managed through the spectacle of boy players and metaphorically represented as tradable goods, however, spectators’ understanding could have potentially been enlarged to a wider idea of female agency, as we will see now through an analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

#### **5.4 Circumventing objectification from the inside**

TRANIO     Twas a commodity lay fretting by you  
                  Twill bring you gain, or perish on the seas (*The Taming of the Shrew* 2.1.320-321).

In *The Taming of the Shrew* Katherine is specifically referred to as a commodity and seems twice defined “by the concept of ‘exchange of women’” (Rubin 205), since she is both exchangeable for her sister and for her dowry. Shakespeare nonetheless challenges concepts of women as exchange goods between men because he accords them space despite their status. As such, theatre brings “onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (Foucault “Spaces” 6). This may indeed be because the playwright is “trying to create a dramatic entertainment, where opposing parties, some of them women, enter into conflict” and without which there would be “fewer stories to tell” (Keinänen Personal communication) or sell; as Barbara Hogdon notes, in itself “a *Shrew* play (or plays) was a popular commodity” (“Arden Shakespeare” 11). It is hence no surprise that other playwrights drew extensively on what Emma Smith terms “the popular cultural trope of the ‘shrew’, the disobedient woman who defies male authority” (“Women” 155). However, Shakespeare’s play may also suggest a vision of the possible reorganisation of the “sex/gender system” that aims not for the elimination of men but for the “elimination of the social system which creates sexism and gender” (Rubin 204). Susan Dwyer Amussen notes that there was an early modern “sexual division of labor which (by and large) made the woman responsible for the internal affairs of the household, the man for the external” (“Ordered Society” 43).

However, as Wendy Wall asks: “How could women be relegated to the household at a time when it was not yet even superficially withdrawn from economic life?” (9). She continues:

Of course, a housewife would have undertaken tasks, such as sweeping and cooking that fall more readily within the realm of modern housework. Yet some of her chores required the public exchange of now intimate materials (such as urine and breast milk) and the use of now taboo items such as human bone and umbilical cords. Violating modern expectations of propriety and privacy, premodern housework established only loose boundaries around the body and the household (21).

We have seen how the early modern system did, however, maintain gender division and the division of the sexes thanks to divisions of space. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, however, there appears to be an elimination of boundaries containing women and a tentative representation of an “androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does” (Rubin 204).

Admittedly, a genderless society does not seem a possibility at the beginning of the play. As we see in the epigraph to this section, Baptista’s elder daughter, Katherine, is explicitly compared by Tranio (as Lucentio) to her father’s goods to profit from as Baptista sees fit. Baptista’s own immediately preceding metaphor: “I play a merchant’s part, / And venture on a desperate mart” (2.1.318-319) further emphasises the double trade he is undertaking: Katherine’s exchange for commodities and her commodity equivalent for her younger sister, Bianca, who already has three suitors. The patriarch and Bianca’s suitors thus convince the penniless aristocrat-cum-fortune-hunter Petruchio to wed Katherine. The use of the word commodity concerning Katherine evidently brings to mind the profit, and the easy laughs, to be had from marriage but also reminds audiences of the dynamics of theatre that are exaggerated since the conflict is precisely what makes a story sell. As Jean E. Howard has noted, like the reduction of Baptista’s daughter to a commodity, narratives such as *A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel’s Skin for her Good Behaviour* (circa 1550) were generally centered on such brutal gender ideology: “In this ballad, a strong-willed wife is beaten bloody by her husband and then wrapped inside the salted skin of a dead horse named Morel” (“Norton Shakespeare” 162). Some scholars have seen Shakespeare as condoning the system. Linda Woodbridge posits, for example, that “Petruchio starves Kate, deprives her of sleep, and publicly humiliates her; for this he is celebrated as having done the state some service. I cannot overcome my impression that Shakespeare – like the authors of the Morel’s skin story [...]”

relished his heroine's humiliation" (207). Following Woodbridge's interpretation, it clearly emerges that once in marriage there was little official means for escape from the male-dominated framework for an early modern housewife.

"Purported humanists" (Woodbridge 323) like Erasmus in *A mery dialogue, declaringe the propertyes of shrowde shrewes, and honest wyues* (1557) thus advised women to endure or counterfeit compliance. The philosopher warns: "The apparell of honest wives is not in the array of the body, nor in the atirements of their head, [...] but in good lying and honest conversation and in the ornaments of the soul" (Aiii). Such rhetoric accordingly leads Woodbridge to theorise Katherine's submissiveness as "slyly–feigned [...] a more useful program than shrewishness for the power-minded wife" (323). Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that while early modern women could be dispossessed, married off, ravished, beaten or bought, they could also feign compliance to circumvent their husbands' will. Early modern women were not, therefore, merely objects of male desire, or mere objects. *The Taming of the Shrew* reveals such ideas of transformation and men only acting the part of the dominant male. We are witness to the intertwined intrigues involving Bianca and Lucentio, where the young man changes his clothes with his valet Tranio to oust a rival; and Katherine and Petruchio, where the husband also changes costume to assert male authority; these two plots are themselves enacted within the framework of the prologue involving Christopher Sly (a drunk peasant dressed as a great lord by a mocking noble).

Above all, it is through horizontal spatial theatrical transformations in *The Taming of the Shrew* that ideas of female commodification by men are challenged. While the play ostensibly complies to the early modern patriarchal doxa that objectifies the female body by confining it to the household space (a father's and later a husband's), Katherine first resists confinement verbally, then reinterprets it by sending out Petruchio to earn a living, which would have been paradoxical for an aristocrat, however impoverished. Shakespeare thus makes it possible to link economic and social rights for women on stage despite his being a culture where the female body was considered a commodity.

Even during their courtship, Katherine resists commodification by threatening to comb Petruchio's "noddle with a three-legged stool, / And paint [his] face [with blood], and use [him] like a fool" (1.1.64-65). In Shakespeare it would seem that the theatre of manhood would only be a spectacle of Guignol if it was not counterbalanced by a feminine vitality, which allows Katherine to preserve her integrity and so begin a mutually respectful relation. Moreover, a parallel can be drawn between Erasmus' 1557 work and a verbal joust between Petruchio and Katherine. In Erasmus, a household scene described by one of the characters, Xantippa, goes

as follows, “He toke up a staffe [...], ready to laye me on the bones [...]. I gat me a thre foted stole in hand. & he had but ones layd his littell finger on me, he shulde not have founde me lame” (Aiii). In Shakespeare, using the subtleties of language and playing on words, Katherine also informs the public about her future husband’s personality. Contrary to popular belief, it is the man who is compared to an object (“joint stool”), which recalls the text of Erasmus, but also the changeable and unpredictable (“moveable”) character of Petruchio. Katherine has to cope with throughout the play, especially at the wedding (3.2 and 3.3), at Petruchio’s house (4.1 and 4.3) or during the meeting with Vincentio (4.5):

PETRUCHIO	Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.
KATHERINE	Moved? In good time. Let him that moved you hither Re-move you hence. I knew you at the first You were a moveable.
PETRUCHIO	Why, what’s a moveable?
KATHERINE	A joint-stool    ( <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> 2.1.192-197).

Richard Hosley compares this excerpt with the lines: “To comb your noddle with a three-legged stool, / And paint your face [with blood], and use you like a fool” (1.1.64-65) and underlines marked similarities between Shakespeare and Erasmus: “[Xantippa] is a shrew who must cope with a male shrew [...]. But, being only shrewish in response to her husband’s shrewishness, [she] is also a potentially reasonable wife who is advised to alter her customary behavior in order to induce her husband to mend his ways” (299). As such, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the term “moveable”, usually meaning a commodity, also performs a certain idea of flexibility; it suggests adaptability of the body as well as the intellect. Indeed, “to move” means, in a moral sense, to excite, and, through a social lens, the word conveys the idea of “revolt, riot” (ODEE 594). Blurring the boundaries between desire and possession, Shakespeare at once seems to suggest that the concealment of the person behind the object could provide a coping strategy to resist commodification for Katherine. As Lena Cowen Orlin observes: “[I]n *The Taming of the Shrew*, the performance of persons intersects with that of things with significant regularity and markedly similar ways” (180) for the process to become plausible. In other words, in the everyday environment portrayed by the playwright, properties such as the ring or a humble stool and performances of exchanging objects in household spaces are inextricably linked, and contribute to creating a system of values inversely proportional to our initial expectations. According to Lena Cowen Orlin’s analysis: “[T]he two sisters comprise



sometimes walke / he shall have even as good as he doth bring / I will not die in his debt for anything” (B2). Above all, as the boundary between the public sphere and the private sphere was not as clear as it is today, women under pressure from their husbands could also turn to others for support and help. In Thomas Harman’s *A caueat for commen cursetors vlgarely called uagabones* (1567), for instance, a vagabond woman helps a wife and four “gossips” punish a debauched husband:

[A]nd when they had made him sure and fast [and] had well beaten him that the blood burst plentifully out, in most places, they let him lie still bound. With this exhortation, that he should from that time forth know his wife from other men and that this punishment was but a flaying in respect of that which should follow if he amended not his manners (F4).

Katherine does actually beat her husband in *The Taming of the Shrew*. She also plausibly declares her autonomy by initially refusing to depart from within the walls of her father’s home for the bridal dinner despite Petruchio’s fantastical wedding garb (a taming-tactic to shame his wife into submission):

KATHERINE    Nay, then, do what thou canst, I will not go to-day,  
                    No, nor to-morrow – not till I please myself.  
                    The door is open, sir, there lies your way.  
                    You may be jogging whiles your boots are green.  
                    For me, I’ll not be gone till I please myself (*The Taming of the Shrew*  
                    3.3.79-83).

When they eventually leave, it is at Kate’s “command” (3.3.93), in other words in total contradiction to Elizabethan marriage mores. While it is obvious that the official line endorsed male assertion and female submission, Shakespeare succeeds in questioning a submission of women dependent on violence and legislation. Further, and as we will see in the next section, while after their marriage and move to his house Petruchio ostensibly “tames” Katherine, he is also domesticated: the door will henceforth plainly be “open” (3.3.81) for him to go out into the world and support his new wife. Control is inverted because the woman inside the home decrees that her husband leave it, not to parade his superiority but to earn a living. Both male hegemony and aristocratic status are disputed by Shakespeare’s performance of commodities

and spaces in marriage. Katherine is a character from the lower-ranking bourgeois class and initially compared to a mere object, and yet she will rule over her new husband's economic status. Instead of marital enclosure being a codified punishment, she is shown to have an equal say within a fungible early modern social structure and, by her command of space beyond her degree, she imposes her own power.

### **5.5 Satirising husbands in household spaces**

As Georg Simmel points out, the value of an object comes from our subjective criterion. This value is based on perceptions and information conveyed by a process of economic or aesthetic association:

Every cultivated person is able to make a clear distinction in principle between the aesthetic and the sensual enjoyment of female beauty, even though he may not be able to draw the line between these components of his impression on a particular occasion. In the one case we surrender to the object, while in the other case the object surrenders to us. [...] In other words, the content of the feeling is, as it were, absorbed by the object (73).

Within the framework of household space in *The Taming of the Shrew* the power to collect objects, instead of giving meaning to the person who owns them, suggests submission to them. An impression of male submission to objects is given at once by Hortensio who says “[b]y helping Baptista’s eldest daughter to a husband we set you a free husband, [...] Sweet Bianca! Happy man be his dole. He who runs the fastest gets the ring” (1.1.132-135). Hortensio is revealing himself not to be a cultivated person but to be complacently subjecting himself to commodity. By quoting the proverb: “He that runs fastest gets the ring”, Hortensio refers to the ring’s multitudinous meanings: to a game where jousters try to catch a ring on their spears; to the round marriage ring; and, to the shape of female sexual organs. The character is so absorbed by the circulation of objects and rivalry between men for Bianca he becomes unable to make any clear distinction between ethics and aesthetics. Like Hortensio, Gremio simply surrenders himself to objects; Gremio’s list of luxury goods emblematic of ostentatious consumption performs a chaotic and almost incomprehensible heap of commodities that stifles rather than showcases their owner in his household: “[P]late and gold, / [...] My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry . / [...] Costly apparel, tents and canopies, / Fine linen, Turkey cushions bossed with pearl, / Valence of Venice gold in needlework, / Pewter, and brass, and all things that belongs



/ To house or housekeeping” (2.1.339-348). Gremio’s speculation on Bianca’s person thus collapses, just as he had predicted at the beginning of the play: “Our cake’s dough on both sides” (1.1.108). Following the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, we can say that the men in *The Taming of the Shrew* are the victims of a commodity exchange involving their own, rather than their womenfolk’s, subjugation:

[T]he economic object does not have an absolute value as a result of the demand for it, but the demand, as the basis of real or imagined exchange, endows the object with value. [It is] exchange that is the source of value [...] exchange is not a by-product of the mutual valuation of objects, but its source (4).

Martha Hester Fleischer also reminds us of how exchanging rings could signify a betrayal rather than a betokening of patriarchal interests:

Also suspect is another common visual token of affection and fidelity, the jewel or ring [...] the visual language of treachery is the same as that of love; even the most straightforward signification, the simplest use of symbols, cannot elude its ironic context. [...] Scenes of betrothal, like battle scenes, employ the horizontal or confrontational pattern, with its ambivalent meanings of enmity or newborn amity (158-159).

This is particularly true when the dramaturgical approach is as much based on confrontation as on conciliation, as is the case in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Thus, while from the outset we are given the impression that the sisters’ courting is little more than an early modern form of “sex tourism” (Lucentio, whose father is a merchant, is from Pisa; Petruchio comes from Verona), manipulation of props within stage space nonetheless allows Shakespeare’s female characters to resist objectification. Moreover, there is a clear opposition to the aristocrat Petruchio, whose character anticipates Prince Hal’s discussed in Chapter Four and despite both ostensibly performing the customer rather than the commodity.

Petruchio says: “One rich enough to be Petruchio’s wife – / As wealth is burdening my wooing dance – [...] I come to wive it wealthily in Padua” (1.2.64-72). The relationship between the body (“wive”) and fortune (“wealthily”) used by Petruchio performs an interaction between private and public enterprise, as the etymology of these two terms demonstrates. The first term literally means “to take a wife” (ODEE 1010) and, although it is a question of “taking *as* a

wife”, it is the body of the woman that is involved. The second term, in its obsolete form, has the sense of “well-being” (ODEE 996) of a person or members of the community (Commonwealth), a meaning that gradually gives way to “goods and wealth”, or even, by comparison with “Weal”, the “public good” (Commonweal). Yet Petruchio, like Hal after him, can be clearly seen as a fortune hunter character, without any of the nobility that could have honoured him. Katherine certainly recognises Petruchio’s enterprise within her father’s house and satirically emphasises official notions through her own self-representation as a prostitute (“stale”): “I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me between these mates?” (1.1.57-58). The audience probably expected as much anyway, since there was a deep grounding of truth in early modern patriarchal “conjugal lewdness”. Nonetheless, Shakespeare blurs the lines between comedy and tragedy, not taking sides but making sure the audience understands that power works on multiple levels (Keinänen Personal communication).

In fact, even though Shakespeare’s play arguably conditions its audience to adopt normative responses to a traditional shrew taming story, this does not guarantee that the tamer is immune to satiric denunciation and objectification himself. Admittedly, as all of woman’s attendant property became her husband’s when they married, it is no surprise that her body was dispossessed and identified as his belongings. Edgar notes: “If before Marriage the Woman were possessed of Horsses, Weate, Sheepe, Corne, Wool, Money, Plate and Jewels, all manner of moveable substance is presently by continuation the husbands [...] and not the wives which brought them to her husband” (129). In the work collecting the rights of women in their limitations over previous centuries and published in 1632, Edgar, like Shakespeare, makes no judgment as to the correctness or morality of the laws. Furthermore, the above passage explaining how the law impinged on women was perhaps prompted by Shakespeare, who also highlighted their unjust treatment very early on in his career. The following passage, moreover, brings to mind how Petruchio states his intention to control Katherine with the long speech in response to which Katherine’s “command” and through which she appears totally commodified:

PETRUCHIO    I will be master of what is mine own.  
                          She is my goods, my chattels. She is my house,  
                          My household-stuff, my field my barn,  
                          My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything (*The Taming of the Shrew*  
                          3.3.100-103).

If the audience were aware of Thomas Smith's works, they would have known that Petruchio's opinions were that of a passing aristocracy within the increasingly mercantilist commonwealth of the household: Smith says that indeed the husband and wife should rule their chattels, their household stuff and all the other things together ("Commonwealth" 25). Katherine has no lines at all after this speech and is duly carried away. She can be seen to lose this fight; her commands seem meaningless. Her last lines in the sequence preceding Petruchio's: "I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (3.3.91-92) do however recall her intention to use Petruchio "like a fool" (1.1.65) and even beat him into submission with a three-legged stool during their courtship. Katherine's last lines in the exchange, perhaps then suggest that she is still a feisty character rather than a commodified housewife and that Petruchio may finally be the one objectified, as Natasha Korda notes:

As a member of the gentry, Petruchio stands for the residual, land-based values of a domestic economy [...] Yet Petruchio's portrait of an ideally self-sufficient household economy, in which the value of things is taken to be self-evident and not subject to (ex)change, is belied by the straightforwardly mercenary motives he avows for marrying Kate. [...] If Petruchio succeeds in mastering Kate, his position as master is nevertheless qualified by his own subjection to the exigencies and uncertainties of the new market economy. In his endeavor to domesticate the commodity form, one might say, Petruchio is himself commodified, himself subjected to the logic of commodity exchange. As Gremio so eloquently puts it; in taming Kate, Petruchio is himself 'Kated' (123).

While the accepted definition of the gentleman is given by Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum* (whoever can live without working with his hands), the Elizabethan writer also gives a description of the husband within the marital structure which suggests a possible intellectual evolution to this definition:

The naturalest an first conjunction of two toward the making of a further society of continuance is of the husband & of the wife after a diverse sort each having care of the family: the man to get, to trauaile abroad, to defend; the wife, to save that which is gotten, to tarrie at home to distribute that which commeth of the husband's labor for the nurriture of the children and family of them both, and to keep all at home neat and clean (12).

As such, Petruchio is indeed “Kated” (3.2.116) in that Katherine adapts to a policy intended for domestic consumption (“tarrie at home to distribute”), while her husband will have to spend his days outside (“trauaile abroad”) to provide for the needs of the family. In the end, the strategy that Petruchio expresses to signify his intention to subdue Katherine: “For I am he born to tame you Kate, / And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Conformable as other household Kates” (2.1.268-270), will turn against him because, as a husband rather than a fortune hunting aristocrat, he will be forced to give up his purchasing power to a wife from the mercantile bourgeoisie.

More widely, on a metaphysical level, early modern marriage also focusses on the notion of women represented in space as dull orbs that only shine by virtue of their husbands’ bright sunshine rays:

But the prerogative of the Husband is best discerned in his dominion over all externe things [...] whatsoever the Husband had before Couverture either in goods or land, it is absolutely his owne the wife hath therein no say in at all. [...] 33. H. 6. A wife how gallant soever she be, glitereth but in the riches of her husband, as the Moone hath not light, but it is the Sunnes. Yea and her Phoebe boroweth sometime her own proper light from Phoebus (Edgar 129).

The imagery is perhaps only to be expected as it translates early modern assumptions about man’s place in the universe. Yet, if we see Katherine’s responses as ironic, we recognise the discrepancy between the surface of her replies and their underlying critique of patriarchy. For scholars such as Linda Woodbridge, the Renaissance was an age when female-dominated courtly love, such as that between Bianca and her suitors, could be grafted upon male-dominated marriage like that theorised by Petruchio. As such, the stage’s “insistence on describing women in general as weak and vulnerable while portraying individual women as strong and aggressive” translated “an age when masculine weakness expressed itself in macho aggressiveness” (323). Katherine is seemingly made weak when Petruchio shamefully capitalises on her riches and his newly acquired marital status to enforce her submission. The scene when they return to Baptista’s house after Katherine’s food and sleep deprivation is saturated with language anticipating Edgar’s callous anthology instead of being simply the witty banter of romantic comedy:

PETRUCHIO

Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!

KATHERINE	The moon? – the sun. It is not moonlight now.
PETRUCHIO	I say it is the moon that shines so bright.
KATHERINE	I know it is the sun that shines so bright.
PETRUCHIO	Now, by my mother's son – and that's myself – It shall be the moon, or star, or what I list Or ere I journey to your father's house [...]
KATHERINE	Forward I pray, since we have come so far And be it moon or sun or what you please ( <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> 4.6.3-13).

Spectators know that Petruchio's motivations are financial and the pugilistic courtship, negotiations and subsequent marriage have exemplified Katherine's status as a commodity. Yet, he is not a romantic conquering hero, not the "Phoebus" as Edgar would have him, but simply a materialistic, if aristocratic, pretender and husband. As Lysimachus, Petruchio appears to try to reinforce his authority through commercial references such as jewels or attire that underpin the idea of women as commodities: "We will have rings, and things, and fine array; / And kiss me Kate. We will be married on Sunday" (2.1.315-316). Apart from merely subjecting himself to the logic of the market and distancing any romantic attachment, however, he recalls the powerful image of entrapment of the "Induction" that frames the whole play in a fabricated male complacency thanks to its fictitious on-stage observer, the drunken tinker Christopher Sly, with his unwitting transformation at the beginning of the plot.

The conventions of wife "taming" literature can thus be seen to result in Petruchio's own objectification. The framework narrative may provide a satirical observation on the man in the street's fantasies of taming their own wives; it clearly dilutes Petruchio's authority. As such, the text itself "resists certain control [...]" as evidenced particularly by the many conflicting readings of the purpose of the Induction and of the meaning of Katherine's closing speech" (Orlin 182), whereby Katherine ostensibly beseeches her fellow wives to obey their husbands, and concludes by placing her hand under her husband's foot. Thomas Smith remarks how the commonwealth is well balanced when each party agrees "like a garment to the body, or a shoe to the foot" ("Commonwealth" 33). Katherine's irony, or "pretended ignorance" (OED "irony" etymology) and use of wits to survive, hence provides her with some of the qualities of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* since her words and actions satirise the society around her and objectify her husband, if he continues to parade his authority, like an actor. Katherine's opting for what can be seen as survival over personal integrity all the better reveals

her husband's comfort-worship and its consequences. The well-recognisable shrew story set in household spaces prompts recognition of audiences' own experiences and can be mediated either through the male or female gaze, on a horizontal level and, upwards, to metaphysical heights above sublunary male existence.

The focus on women-as-objects circumventing their status despite being restricted in spaces would further be developed by Shakespeare, for instance in the enchanted forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Oberon, King of the Fairies, orders his lieutenant, Puck, to drug his Queen, Titania, so that she will fall in love with whomever she sees first. Oberon has accused Titania of an over-pronounced fondness for Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Titania refuses to hand over the young human boy she has chosen as chief page whom Oberon demands as a peace offering. Instead, she takes leave of Oberon, thereby marking her own physical independence, and inscribes her private and public power by declining Oberon's: "Not for thy fairy kingdom / we shall chide downright, if I longer stay" (2.1.144-145). Furthermore, if she is drugged and falls in love with Bottom, an amateur performer, to whom Puck has given an asses' head in accordance with Oberon's sentence, this only further undermines Oberon's authority since spectators witness his embarrassing trick upon her all for the commodity of the pageboy. Moreover, Oberon's power to regulate human relationships in the woods is diluted by Puck's mistaken administration of love juice to two young couples in the woods: Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius. Indeed, the latter is not even administered an antidote, which further discredits the capacity of patriarchal power to regulate society from within. The marriage systems in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are dependent not simply on immediate partners, but upon "several degrees of remove" because "men are concerned with the domestic affairs of others, whose relationship with them may be extremely indirect" (Rubin 206-207). This example points to how marriage is always at once reliant on "stratification" and part of "total social systems" (Rubin 207) and thus how male characters can also be discredited through mismanagement of these different theatrical social spaces.

In *The Taming of the Shrew* even the space of Shakespeare's text itself frustrates traditional interpretation. The complicated comic plot, involving a great deal of trickery and masquerade, may lead audiences to conclude that Katherine's "moon or sun" speech, for instance, is only paying lip service to submissiveness and may rather anticipate Titania's mocking defiance. Additionally, Lena Cowen Orlin observes how Petruchio's lines: "Where's the cook? Is supper ready, the house trim'd, rushes strew'd, cobwebs swept" (4.1.45-47) are spoken, not to Katherine's, but the spectators' hearing, manipulating expectations of a neatly ordered household "so that we are as much taken by surprise [...] as she is by the unreadiness

she discovers” (182). Petruchio, like Oberon, is not capable of running his own household or regulating his servants. The marriage to a wealthy heiress that should have lightened Petruchio’s existence has, in fact, tied him to the role of breadwinner due to his own commodity bias. The heterotopic spaces and the evolution of Katherine’s character within the space of Shakespeare’s text reveal alternatives to Elizabethan marriage mores and the unquestioned acknowledgement of women’s “place in the Great Chain of Being under God the Father and his representative on earth, the monarch” (Gay 92), or even under her husband.

Shakespeare’s representations of ambiguous identity (between master and servant or husband and wife) is particularly audacious, prompts debates and broadens reference criteria, both in theatre as well as in society. To more clearly show how Shakespeare was pioneering in his equivocal representation of marriage and identity in household spaces through the theatrical use of dress, I have included some reference to other plays relevant to the issues discussed here.

### **5.6 Changing concepts through costume**

Shakespeare’s plays that represent the politics of marriage bring to mind other famous early modern comedies where the language of costume in household spaces is revealed as the catalyst for a husband and wife equality that transcends objectification. In Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize or The Tamer Tamed* (c. 1604) and Jonson’s *Epicene* (1609), the comic ring business of nuptials is exploited further through the theatrical use of dress and stage properties such as wigs to provoke response to the themes of desire and fortune-hunting. These become the pivotal centerpiece of the latter play’s denouement, since Epicene’s “peruke” first epitomises the interchangeability of bodies with objects on the early modern stage and then reveals the confusion of social relations when mediated through commodities and notions of people as tradeable goods.

For Jane MacIntyre, actors’ stage attire was supposed to reflect that of characters’ real-life counterparts and yet conventions could be disturbed for comic effect if the play was making a point about someone being dressed inappropriately (42-43). Theatrical conversion of dress and actors changing clothing suggested inward change or expressed a modification of situation, showing “a character’s new degree or occupation” (19). However, improprieties of dress do more than help to drive the plot or cause laughter; they also serve ethical purposes and convey a cultural message (MacIntyre 175), and costume also conveys ideas of complying with or contesting commodification. *The Taming of the Shrew* was reprinted in 1607 (Hogdon 9), at approximately the time when *The Woman’s Prize* and *Epicene* were being composed and *The Woman’s Prize* was performed simultaneously with Shakespeare’s play in a 1633 revival of



both by the King's Men (the King's men performed *The Taming of the Shrew* at St James's Palace from 26<sup>th</sup> November and *The Tamer Tamed* from 28<sup>th</sup> November 1633), which suggests their themes could be connected to my arguments in this chapter, since role reversal and male objectification through costume becomes more prominent and complicates notions of unchallenged patriarchy.

In Jonson's *Epicene*, Epicene embodies traits that mirror those of his husband Morose and brings men down a peg to an equal cultural par with women to denounce the patriarchal tenets of marriage when his true gender is revealed by Dauphine's removal of his "peruke" (5.4.183) or wig. In this way, what turns out to be man is identified through costume traditionally associated with women and the commodity of the wig offers an ironic counterpoint to female objectification through costume. For Gordon Campbell, *Epicene* can thus become a play "about transvestism and the crossing of gender boundaries" (xvi) and it plainly uses the metaphor of costume to caricature societal convention. Similar to the Petruchio of Shakespeare's play, whose ideal was to "wive it wealthily" (1.2.72), the motivation for Morose's marriage is also money orientated in that "it is grounded in a mean desire to disinherit a relative" (Campbell xvii). Further, the supposed oxymoron in the play's subtitle (*The Silent Woman*) shows not love, but how the "predatory and self-serving relations between characters convey the idea of sexual fulfilment as individual gratification, a solo performance of the stark object status of the (hopefully, consenting) partner" (Homem 164).

Moreover, the virgin queen Elizabeth I was famous for wearing an elaborate, tightly curled, red wig and Louis XIV's royal patronage had made long curly wigs almost ridiculously popular as a self-centred commodity by the end of the seventeenth century. While it is funny when the wig is removed, as so many male actors would have been wearing wigs to turn them into women, more laughs could have been had from the absurd commodity fad. At the same time, Liza Picard reminds us of how Elizabeth I issued numerous proclamations about clothing, no less than eight during her reign. Elizabeth's Proclamation against Excess of Apparel (15 June 1574) was a specific law relating to dress codes, which dictated the colours and fabrics that people were permitted to wear based on their social rank and wealth:

Restrictions were placed on a range of fabrics including cloth of gold, velvet, silks, furs and damask and even on buttons and swords. Historically, clothing had been a clear indicator of one's place in the social hierarchy, but that was challenged during the reign of Henry VIII by the rise of the wealthy merchant classes who started imitating the nobility in dress. [...] These proclamations were intended to enforce the statutes and to

justify these laws by emphasising: fear of the rise in extravagant spending on clothes and its impact on the nation's wealth; concern for young gentlemen who were running themselves into debt with excessive spending; concern that these men would turn to crime to fund their habit; condemnation of pride; and dislike of the subversion of order represented by people flouting existing laws. The chief reason seems to be the dislike and fear of people – particularly 'the inferior sort' – dressing above their station, which Elizabeth complained was causing 'disorder and confusion of the degrees of all states' (para. 3).

As one of Jonson's most championed plays, *Epicene* has been highlighted for its technical artistry. D. H. Craig, for instance, refers to Dryden's appreciation of *Epicene* as "one of the most perfect models of dramatic composition" (8). Yet, the *leitmotif* of the wig complicates this uniquely technical appraisal as the play very clearly confronts real life conventions and theatrical commodity; the visual symbol of the wig shows early modern society struggling with issues of disorder and identity; in this play it is the male who dresses up as Epicene who is being commodified, not an actual woman (Keinänen Personal communication).

Fletcher's play, *The Tamer Tamed, or The Woman's Prize* (widely held to be a theatrical response to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, or the borrowing from the character of Morose "name, age, nightcaps, and nuptial ambition" (Daileader and Taylor 11)) is also a story about "the struggle over who wears the breeches – the metonym for male authority" (Smith "Women" 176). The women in the play "Dance with their coats tucked up to their bare breeches" (2.5.40); sing that "For the good of the commonweal / The women shall wear the breeches" (2.5.52-53); and, the memory of Petruccio's first wife has him "hiding his breeches out of fear her ghost / Should walk and wear 'em yet" (1.2.35-36). In the play, recently widowed Petruccio has just remarried. His superficially obedient new spouse turns out, however, to be capable of barricading herself in her bedroom and refusing to consummate their marriage before she is satisfied that she has tamed her husband. When Petruccio reads out loud Maria's list of demands, they include "liberty and clothes" (2.5.137), at first glance suggesting a trivial overlap of consumerist desire and societal critique. However, clothes are also a form of empowerment because creating a visible identification of woman with the outside world whilst the male characters in the play are condemned to ruefully watch over its disordered interior (Smith "Women" 173). Considering the play was created within the framework of anti-enclosure riots, several of which were entirely feminine, it is likely that many audience members would have perceived Fletcher's sympathy for the rebels. Audiences would have also, without doubt, have

understood the wider signification of the destruction of patriarchal barriers calculated to deprive women of their liberty in the same way that citizens and levelers “were tearing down new fences and hedges designed to privatize what had been previously public property” (Daileader and Taylor 8).

According to Daileader and Taylor, Fletcher distanced himself from Shakespeare and Jonson’s works by not associating female independence with anti-patriarchy or “conspiracy, hatred, hermaphrodites, or a husband desperate enough for divorce to make a public proclamation of his sexual impotence (only to learn that he is no ‘husband’, she is no ‘wife’, and no divorce is necessary)” (8). As such, Maria need not debase herself in a “43-line speech whereby Katherine implores her fellow wives to obey their husbands, concluding in [...] the placing of her hand below her husband’s foot” (13). Here, Maria is seen as a symbol of independent agency in an egalitarian society: the system upon which Fletcher’s play world social order is based. Maria stresses her true love for her husband by saying “I’d take Petruccio in’s shirt [...] Before the best man living” (1.3.102-104). The simplest apparel suggests she is not driven by money but romantic attachment. Costume as a trope for gender hierarchy could be a glimpse to women’s emancipation according to Fletcher’s ethical theatrical design: “To teach both sexes due equality” (5.4.97), rather than liberation achieved through the demonstration of increased buying power.

Thanks to the examples from Fletcher’s play involving clothes as commodity we may conclude that the question of the kind and degree of irony in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* depends on whether we think Shakespeare was playing on the ancient set of assumptions about man’s place in the world or not. If not, then we can agree with Daileader and Taylor that Katherine’s is a prudential, money-driven match and she becomes submissive to her husband in a marriage. The ambiguity and the variety of episodes in the play, along with the increasing autonomy mercantilism was giving women, may suggest otherwise. As we have seen, although Katherine seems outwardly oppressed, thanks to her command of inside spaces and cunning use of commodities such as the three-legged stool she can also be said to remain independent. She bravely defends the (limited) autonomy and female solidarity that was present in early modern England, at least in popular literature, as we saw in the examples from Tilney and Rowlands. In a system that commodified women, it was perhaps not the transparency of a frontal attack but a disguised offensive that was the best form of resistance. The beginning of the play warns the audience to be wary of appearances thanks to the parody of submission of a nobleman to a tinker; the action ends with the oratorical demonstration of the new role entrusted to Katherine, which consists in interpreting and applying the laws of her husband:

KATHERINE    Fie, fie, unknit that threat'ning, unkind brow,  
                     And dart not scornful glances from those eyes  
                     To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor. [...]  
                     Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
                     Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee,  
                     And for thy maintenance commits his body [...]  
                     Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe,  
                     And craves no other tribute at thy hands  
                     But love, fair looks, and true obedience,  
                     Too little payment for so great a debt (*The Taming of the Shrew* 5.2.140-158).

Her elaborate testimony to female submission draws a parallel with the spoof subordination of the play's opening. Above all, the statement demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, even men in powerful positions could be objectified thanks to their own submission to commodity ("[F]or thy maintenance commits his body").

Roles can be said to be completely reversed. Household chaos places obstacles on the path of linear patriarchal development and puts it permanently into question. For instance, the apparition of Vincentio, Lucentio's father, suspends the action and sheds light on the many forms that insubordination and identity can take in spaces where both should be stable: "What am I sir? Nay, what are you sir? O immortal gods, O fine villain, a silken doublet, a velvet hose, a scarlet cloak, and a copintank hat – O I am undone, I am undone! While I play the good husband at home, my son and servant spend all at the university" (5.2.53-57). It is Tranio, a servant disguised as Lucentio who meets Vincentio during his trip from Pisa to Padua (the real Lucentio having disguised himself as a preceptor to get closer to Bianca). Because Vincentio calls Tranio names meant for luxurious clothes ("silken doublet, velvet hose, a scarlet cloak, and a copintank hat") it can be said that the servant uses the power of his clothes to reverse the usual social hierarchy.

It is true that the denouement of the play reestablishes the customary spatial/social order; Tranio resumes his role of household servant and Lucentio that of subordinate of his father. Such a process has invited scholars like Stephen Greenblatt to analyse the political stakes of the codified system of early modern clothing, which was the outward expression of an inner reality of wealth. According to Greenblatt, the early modern dress code serves mainly to strengthen an

easily recognisable system of information and rules that ensure the stability of an authority which presupposes financial independence within society:

Whatever the personal resonance of Shakespeare's own life, his art is deeply enmeshed in the collective hopes, fears and fantasies of his own time. For example, throughout his plays, Shakespeare draws heavily upon his culture's investment in costume, symbols of authority, visible signs of status [...] clothes that one is, in effect, *permitted* or *compelled* to wear, since there is little freedom in dress. [...] What looks like an escape from cultural determinism may only be a deeper form of constraint. We may take, as an allegorical emblem of this constraint the transformation of the beggar Christopher Sly into a nobleman [...] the transformation seems to suggest you are free to make yourself whatever you choose to be [...] but in fact he is only the subject of the mischievous lord's experiment, designed to demonstrate the interwovenness of clothes and identity ("Norton Shakespeare" 59-60).

Similarly, the subjugation of Katherine by Petruchio is a process involving imposed dress, her lower rank demanding that she wear a certain type of clothing. When the tailor arrives to present him with a fashionable hat of the period, he refuses it because of her insubordination: "When you are gentle, you shall have one, too, / And not till then" (4.3.69-72). However, the term "gentle" means both "well-born; noble, generous" and "domesticated, tame [...] folding, soft, mild" (ODEE 394). So, if we cannot oppose the idea that Petruchio wants to make his wife a noble and generous woman, we cannot ignore the idea of self-interest in Katherine's final show of submissive behaviour. While she throws the hat on the floor at the command of her husband at the end of the play ("Off with that bauble, throw it underfoot" (5.2.126)), she does so to enrich the household space she is now part of, since both bet together against Lucentio and Hortensio, and she has everything to gain by feigning submission. As Stephen Greenblatt concedes:

[V]irtually all of Shakespeare's major characters, men and women, convey the sense of both a self-division and an inward expansion. The belief in a complex inward realm beyond costumes and status is a striking inversion of the clothes cult: [...] they exist apart from their words and actions, [...] they have hidden dimensions ("Norton Shakespeare" 61).

As such, Shakespeare simultaneously represents the evolution of key values that express themselves in metaphorical images and weakens existing commodity metaphors to create new ones. The irony in the play is thus one of a complicity (involving the playwright and the audience knowing something about the evolving early modern female condition) and a duplicity (Katherine living a life of pretence to fool other characters); the duplicity could even involve her husband, who pretends to be someone other than he is and ultimately fools himself to the extent that his marriage for money only makes him beholden to commodity or objectified himself. This is a fact hinted at by Christopher Sly's unwitting transformation through the commodified trappings of marriage: "Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers, / A most delicious banquet by his bed, / And brave attendants near him when he wakes – / Would not the beggar then forget himself?" (Induction 1.34-37). After examining identity transformations due to costume, we need to look at disguise and deception in *Much Ado About Nothing*, where men are also objectified through commodity confusion just as much as women. Do notions of "verticality" call into question the encoded hierarchies of the modern marriage market just as much as notions of "horizontalty" do in plays like *The Taming of the Shrew*?

### 5.7 Differing perspectives

CLAUDIO        Let every eye negotiate for itself  
                       And trust no agent, for beauty is a witch  
                       Against whose charms faith melteth into blood (*Much Ado About Nothing*  
                       3.1.126-132).

Representing differing perspectives on encoded identities and female commodification also meant moving the spectators' gaze upwards. Shakespeare accordingly makes complete use of theatrical space to upturn ideas of woman-as-object in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Here, as Claudio is invited to look up to the curtained casement, he thinks he sees Hero with Borachio. The language of commerce added to the allusion to external senses ("eye") and inner conviction ("faith") by Claudio, who is himself a victim of theatrical tricks and his own illusory "truth" in the play, calls for investigation into how seeing actors' bodies positioned in different stage spaces could have resisted early modern doxa.

Similarly, in a raised position a female character could have had "an effect on the text in its role as creator of space" (Ubersfeld 97) because such theatrical techniques gave the impression of agency. In other words, in an elevated position, raised up on a vantage point as it were, women were empowered to speak; they were protected. The scene involving Margaret figuring

as Hero though is relevant in many ways to the idea of how there are “a number of instances in Shakespeare’s Italian settings where the audience perceives a young woman’s bedroom as a prison rather than a warm and secure refuge from the tempests of the outside world” (D’Amico 86). As Perry Mills notes, the so-called “balcony” (the word did not appear until 1618) scenes in Jacobean plays often commodified female characters in upper spaces:

Almost always it is a woman who is standing on the balcony. She usually addresses the audience and at some point she looks down and interacts with at least one man. To summarise crudely (but with some justification), the woman is, literally and metaphorically, placed on a pedestal, usually by men. She stands there to express her feelings certainly, but mainly to be adored, observed, regarded, interpreted and objectified – by men (85).

The choice of the word “eye” in the epigraph of this section, however, points to how changing perspectives can be achieved through the act of physical contemplation and stage architecture, especially with the idea of locating women in monetary arbitration (“negotiate”, “agent”). From a theatrical point of view, Claudio’s imaginings of Hero’s infidelity witnessed through an upper casement window (3.3) invert the customary vertical visual hierarchy, where the topmost places were held to symbolise an idealised purity and the stage the workaday world; the misinterpretation by Claudio is potentially comic, but for Hero it is hardly funny. Following Perry Mill’s interpretation of how Oriana is misconstrued as a prostitute in Act 4, scene 2 of Francis Beaumont’s *The Woman Hater* (c. 1605), “the balcony forms a prison; the woman is trapped and under scrutiny, objectified and mis-read” (91).

At the same time, Shakespeare’s use of space also, perhaps surprisingly, weakens male hegemony by placing higher degree women in spaces perceived of as being reserved for whores (such as the prostitutes in the bedroom windows in London street houses or in the galleries of early modern theatres); Shakespeare’s “balcony” scene in *Much Ado About Nothing* thus enacts “different levels” (Mills 96), since the audience is asked to visually concentrate on the upraised character, “Hero”, who is seen to voice (although she in fact says nothing) the totally commodified female condition and belittles the onstage Claudio, who has been given so little room for manoeuvre by the conspirators. Turning Claudio into a gull to commodity, or a “credulous person, dupe” (ODEE 419), would have been particularly paradoxical. John Berger, for instance, informs us that Renaissance use of perspective centres everything upon the “eye of the beholder [...]. Everything converges onto the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity.



The visual world was arranged for the spectator as the universe was thought to be arranged for God” and “every drawing or painting that used perspective proposed to the [male] spectator that he was the unique centre of the world” (16-17). Michael Kubovy generalises upon the inflexibility of the Renaissance paradigm, if used rigidly and concretely, because of its being blinkered by a closed system logic of perspective. He thus argues that a more modern and open paradigm could offer an infinite number of possibilities and viewpoints (169), much like that being used by Shakespeare in *Much Ado About Nothing* in this section’s epigraph.

We know, from Chapter Three, that plays such as *All’s Well that Ends Well* question medieval literary love tropes. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare upturns traditional interpretations of encoded early modern spaces. Within the pivotal window episode, Borachio voices the degrading incident second-hand for the audience in Biblical terms that leave no doubt as to the intended scandal, but the casement scene represents Claudio’s, not Hero’s blinkered “framing”:

But know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero’s gentlewoman, by the name of Hero. She leans me out at her mistress’ chamber window, bids me a thousand times good night – I tell this tale vilely, I should first tell thee how the Prince, Claudio, and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master, Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter (*Much Ado About Nothing* 3.1.126-132).

Apart from the possibly intended distortion of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* due to the duplication of “a thousand times good night” (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.1.199) (Keinänen Personal communication), Borachio clearly connects the incident to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Claudio is “planted” in an “orchard”, invoking the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in Genesis (3:6). The latter is thus deceived into believing Hero and Borachio are to spend the night together and accordingly shames Hero at the altar, in Act 4, by denouncing her supposed sexual crime. Claudio’s denunciation of his bride-to-be is thus shown as an unjust and violently enforced inscription of male power upon her.

Shakespeare’s transformation of the space of the casement into a contemporary spectacle of women framed as commodities underlines the closed violent system of male domination over early modern women. The unjustly slandered Hero destroys confidence in male hegemony and both Biblical and legal commonplace are challenged for spectators through use of space on Shakespeare’s stage. Borachio’s description of “Hero”, not on some unattainable platform, but reported to be brazenly lowering herself, both physically, as she leans

out of her window, and socially, as she brings herself down and calls out to the street, offering herself for sale, like a prostitute, to a manservant, significantly challenges the trope. Hero's supposed non-sanctioned leaning out of the casement increases her visibility and the concept of her as a commodity in an early modern street transaction. The link is made clear by Karen Newman, who notes how the period saw a proliferation of goods for sale and their "presentation as spectacle" ("Fashioning" 131). However, Claudio's misconception significantly disrupts rather than reinforces the inscription of male power upon her. More generally, the distortion of the woman in the window paradigm seems at the heart of a depiction of London's increasingly urban market mentality.

Angela Locatelli argues that all of Shakespeare's settings, however distant, are particularly analogous to Stratford or London (71). Roberta Mullini notes how "Italian places were chosen by playwrights both to distantiate the events of their plays from local English problems (and avoid censorship by doing so) and to reproduce a stereotyped idea of Italy as the land of corrupt power and lost glory" (163). In Shakespeare, the female character in the upper window in *Much Ado About Nothing* is a metaphor or mask for erotic desire, or a powerful image that has Claudio's assumptions collapse beyond all feeling to reveal his narrow mindedness. He consequently confuses art with life and aesthetics with ethics; the result is disastrous and his reading of "Hero" calling down to her supposed lover as a prostitute is detrimental to his character, not hers. In the same way that Falstaff is deceived and manipulated by Prince Hal (*1 Henry IV* 2.3) or by Mistress Ford and Mistress Page (*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.3), Claudio offers himself to audiences (who watch him being gulled) as an object (of ridicule) to greater manipulators than he; he cannot see Margaret as Hero at the window, only Hero as a whore, through the filter of his own values and opinions.

Since prostitutes were conspicuously framed in the equally evocative setting of bedroom windows in London street houses or in galleries around theatres, Shakespeare's public could have possessed the intellectual distance with which to critique Claudio's biased commodity perspective. As James Knowles remarks, London was itself an increasingly commercial configuration, balanced between "a market-driven commercial system and a patronage economy" (xii). He provides a useful reading of London's shared space through the prism of Thomas Dekker's "spoof courtesy manual" (xiii) *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), which focusses on the "fluidity of the social and cultural interaction that occurs" (xiv) thanks to these mechanisms. Theatre even becomes a "Royal Exchange" in figurative reflection of Thomas Gresham's London Stock Exchange in Cornhill Street to show how the implication of exchange

and market metaphors significantly suggests theatre operating as a real exchange with goods and ideas passing in both directions:

The theatre is your poet's Royal Exchange upon which thrive their Muses – that are now turned to merchants – meeting, barter away that light commodity for a lighter ware than words – plaudits [...] Players are their factors who put away the stuff and make the best of it they possibly can [...] Your gallant, your courtier and your captain had wont to be the soundest pay masters [...] when your groundling and gallery commoner buys his sort by the penny and like a haggler is glad to utter it again by retailing (Dekker 59).

To prevent ideas of hermetic conventional boundaries between theatre and exchange, Shakespeare constantly plays on the contrasts and interactions between spatial images and dramatic text. As such, if Margaret is not Hero, she becomes the object of her falsely shameful perdition, while the evocative power of Claudio's credulity brings to light the truth of female objectification and a total subjugation to commodity in men. By confusing encoded commodities and spaces, Shakespeare manages to reposition the bounds of respect and dignity for women whilst acknowledging risks of commodification for their male counterparts.

### **5.8 Transcending categorisation in *Much Ado About Nothing***

BORACHIO [TO CONRAD] We are likely to prove goodly commodity, being taken up of these men's bills.

CONRAD A commodity in question, I warrant you (*Much Ado About Nothing* 3.3.156-158).

Inside space, whether vertical or horizontal, becomes a place that enables women to exceed categorisation as simple commodity. Inversely, the staged boundaries of *Much Ado About Nothing* highlight how men are gulls to commodity (Claudio) or commodities themselves (Borachio or the night watchmen). The motif of the framed casement is a central one in *Much Ado About Nothing* because it is informed by much that was materialistic and plausible in early modern thought: women as prostitutes or woman as moneyed objects in marriage transactions. Like Hermione's "statue" it also makes visible bodily metamorphosis and the physical consequences of societal alienation. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, verticality and the idea of idealised courtly love seems personified by Hero; and horizontality, signifying realistic early modern courtship and apparently grounded in common sense, is embodied by Beatrice. These

aristocratic characters should, normally, also be shown to be in a higher societal position than their social inferiors (Borachio, Margaret). However, Shakespeare plays with and expands upon the symbolism of the tiny balcony space that was traditionally understood to be fixed and not subject to modification as suggested in the play. During the above exchange between Conrad and Borachio during their arrest in *Much Ado about Nothing* (about the disclosure of factual information concerning the scheme aimed specifically at humiliating Hero) notions of commodity are called into question: Borachio finds the commodity scam particularly disappointing. For, having lent his body to the trickery depicting the seduction of Margaret, posing as Hero, under the astonished eyes of Claudio, all he earns is imprisonment; instead of a quick profit, all the city guards that come to arrest him earn is the modest sum of “five shillings” (3.3.70). Like the Christopher Sly Induction in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the peripheral male characters’ gulling and objectification seems a foil to the major characters’ commodity credulity and calls into question early modern perspectives on a gendered balance of power.

In what seems to be a clue to the *double entendre*, even the play on words in “being taken up of these men’s bills” (3.3.156-157) is multiple: “[A]fter we have been hoisted on their halberds (‘weapons’); been arrested on their warrants; been obtained on credit (‘taken up’) in exchange for their bonds (‘bills’)” (Greenblatt “Norton Shakespeare” 1446). Similarly, “[A] commodity in question” (3.3.158) has a twofold meaning: “Of doubtful value; about to be judicially interrogated” (Greenblatt “Norton Shakespeare” 1446). The stage casement from which Hero is said to lean in *Much Ado About Nothing* merges with outer space to create a broad-spectrum identity: one that includes both romanticised fantasy and unsophisticated realism. For D’Amico, the Messinan-cum-London window the character is framed in is, above all, an urban space within which one can “be protected, or from which one can be banished” (10) because “cities also have the capacity, like the stage, to wall in open spaces, to close gates, doors, and windows” (14). At the same time, if the enclosed upper space of the casement designates Hero as a commodity, the open stage where Claudio is said to be situated “maps an urban space that would have reminded the audience of the social and economic forces that drew many young men, like Shakespeare, to the city of London” (36). Indeed, the Garden of Eden metaphor “has an obvious metatheatrical quality that suits the staged scene designed to precipitate a transformation” (125). In this way, Hero’s and Claudio’s identities as commodities are questioned, since Hero is shown to be unjustly objectified and Claudio is associated with the men coming to London to sell their time spent at work, through Shakespeare’s stage management of space.

Beatrice, if she remains on ground level, also explicitly questions male authority. Her “O that I were a man” (4.1.312-313) speech seems to anticipate Lady Macbeth’s ruthlessly audacious and vigorous occupation of male space by calling upon the spirits to “unsex me here (i.e. make her mannish) / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full: / Of direst cruelty” (*Macbeth* 1.5.39-41). On a state level, *Macbeth* also opens with a physical depiction of unlawful female spatial agency: the three witches. Their stage entrance to make a prophecy that Macbeth shall be “king hereafter” (1.3.48) is an explicit challenge to royalty and their physical presence anticipates Lady Macbeth’s success in her stand to convince her husband to assassinate King Duncan and fulfil the witches’ prophecy. Furthermore, she utters her ambition from within Macbeth’s castle. Her illegitimate disobedience thus underpins her husband’s still more illicit breach of honour and treasonous murder of the king. Lady Macbeth’s unlawfully voiced manhood is all the more mutinous because it is aimed not just against the will of the head of the household but against the head of the state: inside space becomes a place of “verticality” that calls into question the encoded hierarchies of the modern marriage market as well as representing socially mobile empowerment instead of more customary female imprisonment.

The boy actors performing such female roles may also have created a sense of crossing gender boundaries in some spectators. Beatrice, like Lady Macbeth, also makes a stand to convince her partner to challenge a higher degree male character to fulfil her desire for insurgence for the shaming of Hero when she orders Benedick to “Kill Claudio” (4.1.287). She utters her ambition from within, not a castle and the house of a husband, but a church, the house of God. Beatrice’s illegitimate disobedience goes even further than Lady Macbeth’s unlawfully voiced manhood as it is aimed not just against the will of the national ruler but the ruler of the universe, thus moving upwards to transcend sublunary considerations, in a different mode to Katherine in *The Taming of The Shrew*, but no less effectively. As one of Shakespeare’s most popular comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing* has been highlighted by critics as traditionally romantic due to its “old stage-plot – the intrigue against Hero, the accusation at the altar, [and] her vindicated innocence” (Quiller-Couch xii-xiii). Yet, dramatic location, following Foucault’s principle of heterotopia (“Spaces” 6), challenges traditional interpretations. As the actors perform a parody of folkloric female modesty and a strict code of male honour in a supposedly Italianate setting (customarily taken as feudalistic and backward by early modern London audiences), this acts as a foil with which to metaphorically distance and echo the trope of the dystopic cash-nexus London *theatrum mundi*.

## 5.9 Conclusion

All in all, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing* should be regarded as examples of his ongoing attempts to use space to represent women differently. The early modern legal and moral marking of space, women's official segregation from male places of power and a male understanding of women as submissive and passive objects is challenged. In *The Taming of the Shrew* women recuperate and inscribe female power over men from the inside: even if Kate is confined at home, she has the power to insist that Petruchio leave the home to support her; she gets power from within, while he is weighted down by commodity idolatry. Shakespeare's use of horizontal stage space reveals how even household places can provide collective experiences that disrupt a codified understanding of women as inferior to their husbands. The theatrical experiment has been shown to amplify and consider an outdated male perspective on vertical space that mocks the performance of women as passive objects. Hero (or Margaret in the guise of Hero) appearing at the window gains power through Claudio's discreditable conception of her as a lesser commodity, or whore; he loses agency through his association with gulls to commodity, or the minor characters in the play that are completely commodified. Proof of his commodity submission comes with his lack of choice at the altar, whereas Beatrice is shown to have her say. In fact, the play's female characters successfully articulate early modern concerns to reveal womanly proactiveness from a spatially indiscriminate viewpoint and remind audiences of the powerfully subversive possibilities of their supposedly submissive situation.

It becomes increasingly clear that commodity, not the capriciousness of fortune, has made life on earth particularly subject to disorder and sudden change and it seemed no longer certain that men could escape from their own objectification through the merciful intervention of God. The older assumptions of sin and salvation are still a premise in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but Shakespeare also assumes his spectators would understand how Claudio is gradually mired in commodity. His vanity, like Adam's, makes him susceptible to the adulation of commodity that appears to him in the casement window. If he is naïve rather than wicked, the balance is weighted differently in other plays, where men are seen to take the biased steps that confirm their responsibility. The sins of double-dealing and deception of the new commodity paradigm, as represented in the usury swindle in *Measure for Measure*, breed an even more dystopic world, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

- **CHAPTER SIX: COMMODITY, MASTER RASH, ANGELO AND THE DUKE: MISGUIDED MALE AGENCY IN *MEASURE FOR MEASURE***

### **6.1 Introduction**

POMPEY        First, here's young Master Rash; he's in for a commodity of brown paper and old ginger, ninescore and seventeen pounds, of which he made five marks ready money. Marry, then ginger was not much in request (*Measure for Measure* 4.3.3-5).

In *Measure for Measure*, inter-personal Viennese relations raise the question of how much, if anything, men could actually gain from commodity. The brothel pimp Pompey Bum is particularly pessimistic over Master Rash's potential earnings from early modern usury in this instance. His lines describe a money-lending system where the usurer circumvents strict early modern statutory limits on loan interest by compelling the debtor to consent to pay back a fixed sum ("ninescore and seventeen pounds") in exchange for almost worthless goods ("brown paper and old ginger") that he must sell himself for "ready money" (five marks). The usurer would have told Rash he had not enough cash to loan out and the desperate customer thus fell into debt for next to nothing. Put differently, Master Rash paid the large amount of £197 for goods for which he will only obtain approximately the sum of £3 by selling. Nonetheless, the initial loan of £197 would still remain due (Mowat and Werstine 223) and the usurer's "interest" would largely exceed the legally authorised ten percent. And indeed, as Quomodo and Easy note in Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (2.3.190-194), "commodities" were often out of demand or hard to sell and one would have to be a fool to accept them. If men attempted to enforce authority through objects, examples such as Master Rash's "ginger and brown paper" reveal how they could become totally subjected to commodity themselves, by other men: the usurers, who were familiar figures and "whose transactions were not yet disguised under the impersonal mechanism of modern society" (Knights 130).

Perhaps too, because the lines are spoken by a pimp, early modern audiences could have conflated the idea of the profit to be made from both usury and prostitution. In Chapter Four we saw how simultaneous figurative and literal links were made between prostitution and new forms of mercantile behaviour. In *Pericles*, for example, bawds are considered usurers, "living off the whore's investment of labour" (Hawkes "Theory" 104). The idea of money begetting money remained monstrous (Bacon "Essays" lxxix) and, in an expanding early modern consumer culture, the usurer held an ever-growing place in popular imagination as a devilish bawd. Greek philosophers, including Aristotle, had argued that it was unnatural to endeavour



to breed from the inanimate, hence barren, commodity of money; those who attempted to make money from money were circumventing natural law (i.x). Early modern writers, such as Thomas Wilson, terms the “liytly pretye babe” that money brings forth “the babe of darknesse” (259). In Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*, Apemantus calls usurers “Bawds between gold and want” (2.2.62) and gold is termed “the common whore of mankind” (4.3.44). “All who must live in the material conditions of a market economy [were] in some sense ‘whores’” (Staunton 39), and such commonplaces gave rise to the “disturbing notion that everyone was becoming a prostitute” (Hawkes “Usury” 164). The prostitute’s body, by earning money for her pander, was made to bring forth more than the natural order intended; the usurer’s debtor made profit for his creditor and also lost all sense of self.

To show comparable notions in *Measure for Measure*, I will start by examining Master Rash’s “commodity” and its relation to early modern society. Secondly, Angelo’s loan of power is analysed before examining how, even in a position of authority, he cannot circumvent being swindled and has to reimburse his debts. Finally, an assessment of the politics behind *Measure for Measure*’s commodity-filled dystopia shows how, in money-form, “human beings are transformed from qualitative essences – use-values – into quantified symbols: exchange-values” (Hawkes “Theory” 144). Moreover, commodity in *Measure for Measure* sets up the narrative of a mercantile world surrounding spectators in London, even though the play is set in Vienna.

The men in the brothel-as-commodity characters discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five’s commodified husbands are thus joined by more male figures in *Measure for Measure* to continue my narrative of how men, too, were commodified in the early modern period. Frédérique Fouassier-Tate argues that the equilibrium suggested by the play’s title is shaped and sustained essentially by considering on-stage feminine characters as “conceptual equivalents” of the play’s absent prostitutes (8). On the other hand, Jean E. Howard, in relation to Dekker and Middleton’s *The Honest Whore* (1604), contends that early modern comedy’s preoccupation with female prostitution is a smoke screen for anxiety over “civic masculinity being constructed in the marketplace world [that] shares much with the abjected feminine position it so strenuously disavows” (Howard “Masculinity” 29). This chapter thus takes up and develops Howard’s point in connection with *Measure for Measure*.

Perhaps it can be claimed that the balance suggested in *Measure for Measure*’s title is also one that is only achieved by representing men as dupes to commodity and as exchangeable commodity-equivalents, as we have already seen. In *Measure for Measure*, when the ruler of Vienna, Duke Vincentio, ostensibly lends his authority to his appointed deputy, Angelo, he

becomes analogous to the usurer intent on fleecing gulls such as Master Rash; as he puts it himself, “nature never lends / The smallest scruple of her excellence / But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines / Herself the glory of her creditor” (1.1.36-39). Yet we shall see that the hypocritical Duke’s worth is far from the true value of an upright ruler. As Vincentio is revealed not to hold the internal character to match the authority with which he has been invested, shady commerce is shown to have thoroughly contaminated society with characters traded indiscriminately by “fleshmonger[s]” (5.1.328), such as Pompey or the Duke. David Hawkes argues that “Unless it corresponds to [Angelo’s] inherent worth, Angelo realizes, the image of the Duke’s authority will be an empty idol” (“Theory” 173). I go further by arguing that Vincentio’s ostensible worth is already a hypocritical swindle and his title of authority a mere stamp of value to guarantee his authoritative weight in the credit deal he makes with Angelo.

The play’s many ambiguities have led modern scholars to characterise *Measure for Measure* as a “problem play”. F. S. Boas remarks, for instance, that the “perfect balance between thought and language, which marks the final group of historical plays and the joyous comedies, is replaced by a compression of style which often makes the rhythm harsh and the sense obscure” (357). E. M. W. Tillyard also finds the change from human passions to the folklore of the bed trick “too violent” and qualifies the dramatic device as a “breach of internal harmony” (“Problem Plays” 134). Others have more recently stressed Shakespeare’s true-to-life treatment of traditionally stylised romantic-comedy criteria as uncomfortable and challenging. The play’s inherent ambiguity, some critics claim, is one awkwardly balanced between past and present, doctrines and duplicity, conventions and commerce. This is what Richard Hillman calls, for example, “the position of the human soul poised between emblems of Vice and Virtue, evil and good angels” (“Problem Plays” 100), in other words, a situation reminiscent of the status of many characters in the medieval Morality Plays. At the same time, *Measure for Measure* clearly challenges a Manichean relationship between immorality and justice, especially in its examination of male agency within multitudinous commercial contexts – from the business of the brothel or convent to that associated with a couple’s legal commitment. Commodity in *Measure for Measure* could thus help us understand the equivocal and multifaceted nature of early modern male agency. Pompey makes a double complaint about society’s refusal to permit pimping in Vienna: “’Twas never merry world since, of two usuries, the merriest was put down, and the worser allowed by order of law” (3.1.263-264). His words prompt consideration of London’s off-stage world, where such ambiguous practice was a recognisable phenomenon.

## 6.2 Master Rash's ginger and brown paper

As Linda McJannet points out, ginger was primarily associated with merrymaking in early modern England. For instance, she notes how ginger-spiced beer in *Twelfth Night* (2.3.104-105) was part of Sir Toby and Feste's cakes and ale "recipe for the good life" (228): cakes and ale were traditionally associated with church festivals and thus disliked by Puritans (Greenblatt "Norton Shakespeare" 1810). By mentioning ginger as one of the commodities Master Rash was to receive instead of the expected cash, Pompey Bum thus simultaneously underwrites the young man's dissolute personal behaviour, his lack of credit, reputation and worth as well as a wider "socially disruptive articulation of male status" (Sheppard 212), since his conduct would have been offensive to strict Christian principles. First, ginger was principally inscribed with heating properties designed to rouse the sluggish male body into action. John Gerard identifies ginger's rousing properties as "provoking Venerie" (62), or desire, and the herbalist provides a useful clarification as to the foremost symbolism of the plant to the early modern spectator. The so-called doctrine of signatures had argued that phallic-shaped vegetables such as ginger or orchid-like plants would stir up courage and excite male lust as early as the Greek and Roman periods (McLaren 10). McJannet notes that if "spices and spicy commodities are more often alluded to than physically present on stage" (228) the mere mention of the by-then familiar commodity of ginger (a common feature of markets, in gingerbread for example) would have been a way to indicate this significance. Second, to associate ginger with a character named Master Rash (meaning both bearing the visible symptoms of venereal disease and to be impulsive) within a context of credit networks would have further supplemented the semantic importance of the commodity received instead of money. David Hawkes reminds us that "one of the most frequently noted effects of usury was the growth and spread of consumer desires" (34). Shakespeare's decision to use "ginger" is thus one by which dual desire – sexual and consumerist – is manifested. The choice significantly provides a stark contrast to the ideals of male "thrift and vocation" (Sheppard 212), by then meaning humility, honesty, honourable labour and keeping to one's place by maintaining oneself decently within one's calling, in a society that was bound together by justice, which underpinned the early modern dogmatic and patriarchal cultural framework. Restrained manhood was part of this coherent social archetype because male codes of conduct such as frugality or discipline constituted the officially-held values of society that stemmed basically from ideas of the state as an extended family or a responsible gild-brotherhood.

We know that usury was also a contemporary controversy. In Thomas Wilson we read what would have been the official line of thought at the time Shakespeare was writing: "usury

is against charitie” (259); all “‘good’ practices of commerce necessarily avoided the sins of covetousness, miserliness, usury and luxury” (Harris 7). Following the idea that the “commonwealth” was a “household or family” (Malynes “Treatise” 2) with a man at its head, the wealth of the nation was also under the responsibility of the monarch, the ultimate head of the household, whose duty it was to establish equality, justice, employment and “to promote the Christian religion and the material wealth of his subjects” (Hengsmentel 67). Accordingly, Jews, who had been accused of sinning by making profit from money through usury and divesting Christians of their riches, had been banished from England by Edward I’s Edict of Expulsion in 1290. John Stow, in his *Survey of London* reveals the difficult relationship that the two societies maintained, recalling the ambivalent government of prostitution (brothels had to be painted white and to carry a distinctive sign before being outlawed):

The 16. of [King Henry the third] the Jews in London built a Synagogue, but the king commanded that it should be dedicated to our blessed Lady, and after gave it to the Brethren of S. Anthony of Vienna [...] the 20 of this Henry seven Jews were brought from Norwich, which had stolen a Christened child, had circumcised, and had minded to have crucified him at Easter, wherefore their bodies and goods were at the king’s pleasure, the 26. the Jews were constrained to pay to the king 20000 marks at two terms in the year, or else to be kept in perpetual prison [...] The third of Edward the first, in a Parliament at London, usury was forbidden to the Jews, and that all Usurers might be known, the king commanded that all Usurers should wear a Table on their breast [...] or else to avoid the Realm: the 6. of the said king Edward, a reformation was made for clipping of the king’s coin, for which offence 267. Jews were hanged [...] the same year the Jews crucified a child at Northampton, for the which fact many Jews at London were drawn at horses’ tails and hanged [...] in the 19. of his reign, he banished them all out of England, giving them only to bear their charge, the number of Jews then expelled were 15060 persons, the king made a mighty masse of money of their houses, which he sold, and yet the Commons of England had granted gave him a fifteenth of all their goods, to banish them, and thus much for the Jews (282-283).

In medieval England, the offence of usury meant the usurer was not only punished by the censures of the church in his lifetime, but denied a Christian burial, his goods were forfeited to the crown, and his lands to the Lord of the Fee (Horack 36). The burden of an increasing empire, expanding global commerce, as we saw in introduction, however, meant that, in 1545,

Henry VIII allowed the taking of lawful interest of ten percent maximum [37 HENRY VIII, c. 9.]. While Henry's law was repealed by his son's statute ten years later [5 & 6 EDW. VI, c. 20 (1555)], with usury entailing the risk of forfeiting the entire debt, the need for the extension of credit and capital investment was so important that Henry's repealed statute was re-enacted by his daughter [13 ELIZ., c. 18] (Horack 37). After all, as Francis Bacon notes, "that the tooth of usury be grinded that it bite not too much; the other, that there be left open the means to invite moneyed men to lend for the continuing and the quickening of trade" ("Essays" lxxx). Usurers were hence again allowed to take interest "since they were to be damned in any case and, by giving them a monopoly of the usury business the souls of Christians might not be lost" (Horack 36). Eventually, parliament increasingly "abandoned sin to the individual conscience, and left it to the clergy to form consciences" (Jones 160). The exception became the rule and even the rule could be circumvented; Shakespeare's "brown paper" symbolically enacts the unscrupulous moneylenders and their dispossessed debtors during this ambiguous era and its confusion of ethics, semantics and money that throttled the common good and meant that the welfare of many had now become dependent on continuous moneytary movement.

The inclusion of Master Rash's name in a long list of significantly named characters – Master Caper, Master Deepvow, Master Starve-lackey, Master Drophaire, Master Forthright (*Measure for Measure* 4.3.8-13) – at once points to the character's dissolute nature, just as Master Starve-lackey would have failed to feed his servants and the balding Mr Drophaire's loss of hair would have been a sign of syphilis (Maus 2089). It is, however, his surname, with its double connotation, that precisely defines the dual connotation of sexual and financial economy. Further, the addition of two contemporary objects, "ginger" and "brown paper", was a device to indicate meaning, through a real-life effect. Contemporary poems of epic style, intended as didactic justifications of the mysterious ways of God during periods of plague, provide further evidence of the confusion. In the following passage from Rebecca Totaro's modernised version of John Davies' *The Triumph of Death* (1609), for example, exchange goods such as "brown paper" figure to reveal how the early modern idea of usury was "shadowy, and still in the process of formation" (Hawkes "Usury" 28):

Brown-paper merchants (that do vent such trash  
 To heedless heirs, to more welt born than wit,  
 That gainst such Paper-rocks their houses dash  
 While such sly Merchants make much use of it),  
 Use them as they do use such heirs to use,

That is, to plague them without all remorse,  
These with their brokers, plague, for they abuse  
God, King and Law, by Law's abused force (*The Triumph of Death* 99. 251-259).

Davies declares his outrage at moneylenders taking advantage of debtors in times of epidemic and suffering ("trash", "sly", "abuse"). However, the language belies any incontestable logic. The young borrowers ("heirs") are "heedless" and worth a thrashing ("welt") and can be understood as equally challenging "God, King and Law" as their creditors. In this complicated religious, social and political period, the poem suggests the borrowers were partly responsible for their status by creating a vicious circle of consumer demand for their worthless commodities. As David Hawkes notes, Shakespeare was aware of this "disjunction between essence and appearance" ("Theory" 172). In *Measure for Measure*, we see that Vincentio loans out his sham authority whilst imagining he can retain its ownership and even reap usurious profit in the form of added prestige. Yet, the Duke's loan has no real worth but simply "ginger" and "brown paper", and Angelo is responsible for not recognising or rectifying the issue. Like Master Rash, Angelo maintains a vicious circle of bad credit.

For Master Rash, ginger was a commodity that was "not much in request" (4.3.6-7). This was probably because the deceased "old women" (4. 3. 7) who used it to make warming tonics had presumably died in the 1603 plague (Maus 2089) that the bawd Mistress Overdone bemoans in the play as one of the reasons for the brothels being torn down (1.2.72-74). A proclamation dated 16 September 1603 (Steele 111) had indeed "called for the pulling down of houses and rooms in the areas of London as a precaution against the spread of the plague by 'dissolute and idle persons'" (Lever xxxii-xxxiii). If Mistress Overdone complains of being "custom shrunk" (1.2.74), Master Rash may have also been desperately short on customers for his commodity of ginger. Similarly, Angelo could have evaluated the trying and execution of Claudio, not in terms of how useful this would be to society (use-value), but in how much prestige it represented (exchange-value). Both Master Rash's and Angelo's transactions point to the unclear nature of both lender and borrower who can be seen as alternatively victim and offender and vice versa. The confusion becomes clear in Davies's text that uses "iambic pentameter with heroic quatrains rather than couplets [...] to create an undoubtedly intentional contrast between the poem's common prosody and its many other heroic markings" (Totaro 10), even the seemingly improvised literary style of the plague epic itself thus suggests usury to be at once fuelled by multitudinous desires; it is ultimately makeshift, indiscriminate and lawless.



Especially in times of plague, with “concomitant challenges of famine, poverty, and the temptation of quick money offered by pawn brokers or usurers” Londoners, regardless of their particular faiths, would unsurprisingly appear at times to be their own worst enemies (Totaro 3, 11). The public spectacle presented thanks to the continuous market circulation of commodities such as brown paper meant that the borrowers would continue to perform the role of usurers (“Use them as they do use such heirs to use”). In Shakespeare’s Vienna those beholden to commodity also measure their authoritative wealth in terms of quantity, not quality. Vincentio seems at times to play the role of victim and yet is also a usurious tormentor, and Angelo performs the role of the criminal, executor and heedless client. The Duke decides to move out and lend power to his deputy, a hypothetically rigorous representative of the new order. However, the young man’s misguided agency means the older man can return and callously make use of his substitute. The dual signification of usury as both profit and punishment means it is particularly malleable and represented by all sorts of credit systems in the play.

### **6.3 Credit systems in *Measure for Measure***

There is thus a distinct relation between the commodity scam to which Master Rash is victim and Angelo’s misguided appropriation of power. The link is made clear from the outset through the portrayal of Vincentio, a character who seems to be a production of Vienna’s shady microcosm of merrymaking. This may explain his desire to shy away from the public gaze even if, as Lever notes, the trope was a popular one with contemporary ruling monarchs (8). James I, for instance, was a reluctant figurehead and wrote about how he resented being “set upon a public stage in the sight of all the people” (Lever 2). In a similar manner the Duke retires, also explaining his withdrawal from state affairs thanks to an ostensible need to avoid crowds and publicity: “I love the people, But do not wish to stage me to their eyes: though it do well” (1.1.67-68). It soon emerges, however, that Vincentio has “let slip” the “strict statutes and most biting laws” (1.1.21) of his duchy. If Claudio is in prison for having made his legally bound *sponsalia per verba de praesenti* fiancé Juliet pregnant, it is partly because there is “too much liberty” (1.2.105) and the Duke has sinned by omitting to tend to his administration. The point is made again in a description of the Duke by one of his own unwitting counselors, Escalus, in conversation whilst Vincentio is in hiding and in disguise as Friar Lodowick: “Rather rejoicing to see another merry than merry / At anything which professed to make him rejoice” (3.2.459-460). Shakespeare’s linking of the two parts of speech with anadiplosis (the repetition of



“merry”) instead of giving an appearance of logic to suggest a reliable sovereign, only reinforces the impression of misrule.

Such examples suggest the Duke’s decision to delegate part of his authority to Angelo comes from his own and others’ concession of his complacently passive gaze on his subjects’ revelry. Added to this, Lucio’s antithetical description of the “old fantastical Duke of dark corners” (4.3.147-148) combines the familiar Shakespearean epithet “old”, suggesting a recognisable and respected figure of authority and “fantastical”, which contradicts reassuring first impressions because it means “capricious” (Maus “Norton Shakespeare” 2092). The satirical portrayal conveys the disturbing idea of power in the hands of an obscure being operating in “dark corners” as a keeper of secret assignments (Lever 119). The Duke is thus to be seen as a complex allocator of command, office or revenue, in fact much like the shady usurer whose identity was itself “still in the process of formation” (Hawkes 28).

Notwithstanding his own faults, Vincentio persists in maintaining a position of command. The play opens with his apparently well-prepared choice to relinquish his power and responsibilities to Angelo: “We have with special soul / Elected him our absence to supply; / Lent him our terror, drest him with our love, / And given his deputation all the organs of our own power” (1.1.17-21). Once again though, Shakespeare’s use of language contradicts apparent purpose. To start with, the personality trait “our terror”, though a worthy attribute of royalty” (Lever 5), appears to be an oxymoron when attributed to a Duke prone to “rejoicing to see another merry”. The transition from “lent” to “given” seems especially significant, since it implies the Duke is willing to totally surrender his political legitimacy (the body and soul, or “organs”, which constitute his superiority as a ruler).

On the other hand, the terms “supply” and “lent” imply that Vincentio sees himself to be playing the part of a usurer only really paying lip service to generosity. Indeed, the Duke’s stated decision to “remove” (1.1.43) himself from state affairs and yet all the while shadow his substitute disguised as a monk suggests he wishes to check Angelo is doing all the work for him. Lucio’s remark later in the play “*Cucullus non facit monachum*: honest in nothing but his clothes” (5.1.259-260), or “A holie Hood, makes not a Frier deuote” (Lever 137), would seem to corroborate the Duke’s retreat as a rhetorical device to obscure his real intent. If Angelo imagines he is gaining power, he will not only have to totally repay the loan but is borrowing worthless goods. Even so, Vincentio later appears to reap the rewards of Angelo’s incompetent handling of Claudio’s absurd arrest and death sentence for “possession” (1.2.123) of what was already his spouse’s bed in secular terms: the “common law contract of *sponsalia de praesenti*, a mutual recognition as husband and wife in the presence of witnesses, was still valid in

England” (Lever 16). Here, the Duke behaves no better than a petty street usurer deriving profit from a transaction without having to make any effort himself.

Angelo, as Master Rash, misguidedly becomes indebted for next to nothing. He suffers from a similar misapprehension of what it is to use authority as the debtor does with commodity; Angelo’s issuing of an edict to reinforce the lawfulness of Viennese society (2.1) is tantamount to his “misplacing” (2.1.81) the problem. He attempts to follow the equivocal example of the usurer and gain prestige by chastising Claudio’s “act of fornication” (5.1.70); even if, as audiences knew, the act was nothing more than a simple process of nature, especially so as the Greek word for interest translates literally as “offspring”. Yet, laws against fornication in order to control these simple processes of nature maintained some level of social control. Angelo, like a usurer, would thus have been clearly aiming to make profit from Claudio and Juliet’s future child (in an interplay of use and exchange values) by marking his own authority in relation to Vincentio’s lax rule. During the play, however, Angelo discovers himself in the position of Master Rash, the generic debtor, who is divested of his rights and ruthlessly used at interest by the other characters. He totally misunderstands the nature of his contracted agreement with the Duke. Angelo thus becomes reduced to the status of an exchange object himself, whom the other characters take advantage of.

#### **6.4 Barrenness and reproduction**

If Vincentio has seemingly “drest” (1.1.20) Angelo with his love, he has apparently kept the young man in the dark regarding some of the details of his own doubtful statesmanship. As such, Angelo’s fostering enacts that of James I in relation to his son, Henry Duke of Rothesay. When the young boy was only five years old, the king wrote the following words in *Basilikon Doron*, a work whose title means “gift”: “I am no hypocrite, follow my footsteppes, and your owne present education therein” (5). In a similar fashion Angelo has followed in the Duke’s footsteps, although his gift is a clearly hypocritical framework of a lawless society that is paradoxically structured by laws respected by none. Admittedly, Isabella’s aspiration to become a nun would seem help impose order on the dissolute framework, or at least structure it for a while, especially as she too is in the midst of taking vows, *in aeternum*, as a chaste bride of Christ. Against this, Natasha Korda remarks how Isabella, like her brother Claudio, suffers “a broken nuptial”: her interview being interrupted by Lucio, who removes her from the cloister before the vows are complete (163). Unlike critics such as Bernice Kliman, who argue that Isabella would have been dowerless and thus “willing to be rescued by marriage to the Duke” (139), Korda suggests that Isabella may have been financially independent enough to have made

payment to the convent because nuns were “generally required to have dowries, and often trousseaus as well, to recompense nunneries for their expenses and to signify their symbolic marriages to Christ” (164). As with Master Rash’s commodities, such overlapping of the secular and the spiritual allows for a confusing ambivalence that characterises the whole of the play.

Assuming Isabella has a dowry, and if she apparently refuses to participate in worldly commerce thanks to her intentions to become a nun, she seems to immediately understand her role as an embodied article of trade when she first meets with Angelo to plead for her brother’s pardon. In fact, Isabella can be seen to adopt a similar pragmatic approach to male characters treating women as objects as her counterparts such as Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*, Marina in *Pericles* or Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Her stated desire for austere discipline, a more “strict restraint” (1.1.4), does nothing to exclude an almost immediate bartering between herself and the substitute (with Lucio as the broker) for Claudio’s release from prison. Initially enticing Angelo with her faith instead of her body, she promises him “true prayers” (2.2.154), having nothing else to offer. In her very first attempt to convince the Duke’s substitute to spare her brother, her language is nonetheless saturated with the vocabulary of commerce and fortune (“bribe”, “gifts”, “gold”):

ISABELLA	Hark how I’ll bribe you; good my lord, turn back.
ANGELO	How, bribe me?
ISABELLA	<p>Ay, with such gifts that heaven shall share with you. [...]</p> <p>Not with fond shekels of the tested gold,</p> <p>Or stones, whose rate are either rich or poor</p> <p>As fancy values them; but with true prayers,</p> <p>That shall be up at heaven and enter there</p> <p>Ere sunrise, prayers from preservèd souls,</p> <p>From fasting maids whose minds are dedicate</p> <p>To nothing temporal (<i>Measure for Measure</i> 2.2.148-159).</p>

Despite Isabella’s ostensibly pure intentions, the bargaining suggests that she masters the vocabulary and techniques of bodily commerce nonetheless. She here seems to be distancing herself from notions of exchange; this is shown through the significant lexical choice of tokens of “gold” and jewels, or “stones” (2.2.153-154) that she claims do not figuratively suggest her identity. She rather uses the signs as a foil, to all the better negotiate her brother’s freedom, thanks to ideas of her inestimable use-value as a “preservèd soul” and “fasting maid”, in other

words, a virgin. This confuses Angelo, who takes the exchange and use metaphors Isabella uses literally and frames her as such; like Master Rash, he has already begun to misguidedly grasp at exaggerated possibilities of repayment. Angelo aspired to play the usurer with Isabella but here the role is stolen from him along with any command over her.

In an earlier aside, Angelo expresses his misconception of interest and offspring that was intrinsic in the idea of usury as objectified in Isabella: “She speaks, and ’tis such sense / That my desire breeds with it” (2.2.144-145). This points to the misapprehension produced by the dual usurious sexual and consumerist desire which assumes “that money, which is really only a sign, has an essential value in itself” (Hawkes “Theory” 146). Angelo assumes that Isabella’s offer, which is framed in terms of commodity and its monetary representation, has essential value in itself when it is really only a symbol without any reference to her physical or social self. As in *King John*, commodity is figured as a “force that can bypass reason and distort the conscious will” (Hawkes “Theory” 101) even if it is morally wrong to take advantage. As a more amoral counterpart to the gullible Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Angelo commodifies negotiation itself, whether aesthetic (“jewels”), financial (“gold”) or sexual (“desire”, “breed”). Even in this superficially ingenuous transaction, therefore, the vocabulary of commodity occupies the scene, inevitably founding subsequent action in mechanisms of exchange and profit.

In their second interview, Isabella and Angelo continue to employ the lexis of trade. Isabella renews her pleas for Claudio’s life, directly tackling the issue of bawdry and usury in the process: “Sir, believe this. / I had rather give my body than my soul” (2.4.55-56). Angelo speaks of her transfer to his possession both in physical and financial terms: “You must lay down the treasures of your body” (2. 4. 96), meaning her virginity, and, following Lever’s interpretation, “the idea of a heavy bribe may be latent” (59). This explains why Angelo’s self-acknowledged flaw, the attempted seduction of Isabella in exchange for Claudio’s life: “Heaven in my mouth, / As if I did but only chew his name” (2.4.4-5), will do nothing to change his course of action. On the contrary, like the desperately beholden Master Rash, he seems fraught with a desire to pursue at all costs, whether this be to recompense the Duke or to free his own guilty conscience.

Angelo tries to generalise weakness: “We are all frail [...] women are frail too” (2.4.122). However, in a play where most of the action takes place inside, in taverns, prisons or courtrooms, there can be no escape from accountability. Angelo thus fails in his endeavour to include others in the play’s usurious exchange mechanisms by forcing Isabella to become a partner in his crime of seduction. The deputy believes Isabella to be a malleable tool, like a

prostitute, a simple commodity whose ownership depends upon whoever enjoys her services, but she uses his tactics and turns them against him. Despite her status as a novice about to enter a convent, she borrows from Angelo's own codes of use to take advantage of his credulity and subjugate him instead.

### **6.5 Return on investment; claiming reimbursement**

Logically, in a play where the audience is constantly forced to observe how the characters seem to be perpetually looking at themselves and watching each other, spectators now see Vincentio make the most of Isabella's eye-witness account of Angelo's unnatural desire to exchange Claudio's freedom for Isabella's virginity:

CLAUDIO	O heavens, it cannot be!
ISABELLA	Yes, he would give't thee, from this rank offence, So to offend him still. This night's the time That I should do what I abhor to name, Or else thou diest tomorrow ( <i>Measure for Measure</i> 3.1.97-101).

Angelo's upstage heedless totalitarianism is what allows the Duke to reinforce his position as a backstage ruler. Vincentio's suggestion that Mariana be a bed substitute for Isabella – a proposition that would probably have been totally objectionable in former circumstances – now becomes plausible in the wake of the Angelo's evaluation of Isabella in quantitative terms. Consequently, when the Duke disguised as Lodowick replaces Lucio as a broker, Isabella plainly sees the bed-trick involving Mariana as a continued means to preserve her own qualitative state, expressing her satisfaction in terms evoking usury as she does so: "The image of it gives me content already, and I trust it will grow into a most prosperous perfection" (3.1.249-250). It is return on investment that now operates all round: the Duke emerges to chastise his deputy and the clearly identifiable sinner can be punished even if Vincentio (still in disguise as Friar Lodowick) reasserts his power by manipulating the consequences of an injustice that he should be partly be held responsible for himself. Angelo's persecution serves the Duke's purpose just as Master Rash will ultimately serve that of his usurer. The commodity scam also outwardly suits the other characters.

Shakespeare even apparently elevates the Duke above the sublunary microcosm of Vienna by letting him keep on his monk's cowl, so that he appears to operate within a wider macrocosm guided by God. As such, he is free to ostensibly stage manage a solution that "exalts

the Christian ideal of forgiveness at the expense of justice” (Bald “Complete Pelican Shakespeare” 358) and mitigates the eye for eye precepts of the Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not that ye not be judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judges; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Mathew 7:1-2). If Isabella’s “earlier plea for Claudio was based on the old antithesis of justice and mercy” (Bald “Complete Pelican Shakespeare” 358), her straightforward sense of righteousness is nonetheless transformed by the Duke into a more profitable sense of ethics by the end of the play. Unburdened by kinship, Vincentio goes about the business of usurious kingship and claims reimbursement from his stand-in son and heir.

Shakespeare shows spectators how the Duke is superficially able to work out the politics of *medio stat virtus* – “rules of virtuous as social living, not to be snares to trap your goode subjects: and therefore the lawe must be interpreted according to the meaning, and not to the literall sense” (James I 86). This is something that would have been impossible had Vincentio publicly admitted his own failings as a ruler, much like the usurer who appears to have made no official profit at all. The commodity scam culminates in Angelo’s forced wedding with his repudiated fiancée, Mariana and, while the bed-trick disrupts Angelo’s project of possession of Isabella’s person, it also foregrounds the Duke’s venture of eternal ownership of the would-be novice as his bride, ensuring her in his custody in an early modern household rather than a nunnery. The Duke would not only gain Isabella’s body, for, if she has a dowry, he could also appropriate her monetary wealth as well. He thus doubly limits her freedom in a manner analogous to the usurer, who, David Hawkes reminds us, was at liberty to coerce, legally bind and even imprison his debtors (“Theory” 150). Similarly, he restores Mariana’s honour and promises her Angelo’s possessions to “buy [...] a better husband” (5.1.417), recalling the King of France’s simplified cash nexus offer to Diana in *All’s Well that Ends Well*. If Angelo is saved from the executioner’s axe, he has nonetheless been indebted for what he would without doubt consider as inferior commodity and the credit still remains due in full.

Similarly, the final scene on-stage presence of Kate Keepdown, the prostitute who is promised by the Duke to Lucio (because he makes her pregnant in prison) creates a visual bond and generalises notions of supplanting of the human nexus of society at all levels. The visual symbol of the prostitute performs the cultural progression from a spatially and socially localised point of exchange, the brothel, or a rudimentary form of usury “in a place where it was practised between individuals who were often personally known to each other” (Hawkes “Usury” 6) and points to broader forms of exchange across society. Mistress Overdone articulates the expansion of the exchange market when she explains how Lucio capitalised on Kate by promising her

marriage, not in the tavern, but in the equally dissolute context of May Day celebrations: “Mistress Kate Keepdown was with child by him in the Duke’s time; he promised her marriage. His child is a year and a quarter old come Philip and Jacob” (3.1.428-430). Here, as Kate is both a future bride, and yet still a prostitute, the remark points to a generalisation of exchange and a conflation of young girls exploited by brothel-keepers who ran a trade in virgins and the marriage market.

Further, it can be argued that Lucio’s broken promise of marriage alludes to both the legally binding *Sponsalia per verba de praesenti* contract such as the one uniting Claudio and Juliet (like Lucio, Claudio’s fiancé becomes pregnant) and the *Sponsalia per verba de futuro* contract such as the one drawn up between Angelo and Mariana. The promise in both cases depends upon certain conditions such as the provision of a dowry (a sum that would certainly have been difficult to amass for a pregnant prostitute such as Kate). In Mariana’s instance, when her settlement is lost at sea, Angelo quite legally – although just as caddishly as Lucio in his forgotten promise to Kate – repudiates his future spouse on “economic grounds” (Korda 163). Commodity intervenes to create the distortion of human relations tangible and reveal how immoral men motivated by self-interest could not always escape the consequences.

Indeed, commodity swindles were often long-term investments. Wallace Shugg posits that Mistress Overdone’s outwardly professed compassion for Kate Keepdown’s “kept” (3.1.430) year-old bastard in fact points to such practices from the earliest age. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* observes that pregnant prostitutes were generally ejected from brothels (Dobson and Wells 359). However, if Keepdown’s illegitimate child was a girl the child could have been prostituted at a very young age and large sums of money would have been made from her body, “the maidenhead being sold over and over” (Shugg 296). Women as generic objects are thus regarded as a means, not just of immediate profit, but of subsequent wealth creation, because of the successive bodies yielded for future production.

In *Measure for Measure*, however, the same could be said for male characters thanks to the “perceived empirical and conceptual links between prostitution and new forms of economic behaviour” (Hawkes “Theory” 104). With regard to the Duke’s deputy, Lever explains how the profitable transformation of *de futuro* spousals into absolute marriage implies a “cohabitation with Angelo which would, *ipso facto*, make her his wife”. He further states: “Modest and retiring by nature, Mariana was not the person to initiate this step. Both the authority of the Duke and Isabella’s encouragement were required” (liv). Although the scholar, perhaps in line with early modern audiences, perceives no hypocrisy in resolving Isabella’s dilemma by the substitution of her body for Mariana’s in Angelo’s bed, the episode of the solitary bed-trick to



validate the repudiated fiancé's entitlement still manifestly points to a wider framework of "bawdry". The moral justifications for the substitution are even expressed in cyclical terms by the Duke, who uses "pre-contract" or "corn" to suggest Mariana as a bartering tool for Isabella:

DUKE He is your husband on a pre-contract.

To bring you together 'tis no sin,

Sith that the justice of your title to him

Doth flourish the deceit. Come, let us go.

Our corn's to reap, for yet our tilth's to sow (*Measure for Measure* 4.1.68-72).

Lever discusses how comparable imagery of harvest and reward is used in one of Shakespeare's sources, Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), when "Rosko suggests that Lamia [a 'Curtizane'] should ingratiate herself with Phallax, Promos' officer [...] who will protect her" after her trade is outlawed: "They rewarde fayre (their harvest in the stacke), / When winter coms" ("Arden Shakespeare" 170). The Arden Shakespeare prefers "tithe" (dues) to the "tilth" (tilled land) in the Norton Shakespeare. The former version reinforces the idea of long-term financial dealings as it suggests, according to Lever: "'Our corn has still to be reaped, since our tithe is yet to be sown': i.e. the preliminary work must be done before the reward is forthcoming" (100). Pompey also refers to the city brothels as standing to seed (1.2) as in "corn left to ripen" (13) in *Measure for Measure* to suggest a link between the enduring earthy activity of nature and the fluctuating business of making a profit from prostitution or from money itself.

The imagery clearly seems to signify figurative and literal usages of "commodity" to ease a transition from a human nexus to a cash nexus of society. The usurious Duke would thus appear to have the last laugh as he transforms tragedy into comedy, regains prestigious authority and prepares to marry Isabella. However, Isabella's silence in response to Vincentio's marriage proposal enables Shakespeare to leave spectators in eternal doubt over whether she actually accepts it. Further, the playwright's staging of the Duke-as-friar's encounters with the roguish Lucio, who in many ways recalls the picaresque Autolycus, since by his words or actions he satirises those around him, frustrates the impression of the shady usurious ruler ultimately reaping all the profit. Lucio's comic irreverence in the Duke's presence happens upon a sufficiently large number of occasions for audiences to realise this. There is a reversal of traditional values throughout the play, just as the Duke's own comments at its beginning suggest will be the case: "And liberty plucks Justice by the nose, / The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart / Goes all decorum" (1.3.29-31). As such, even the play's "Rex" ultimately proves to

be nothing anything more than “text”, since Shakespeare enlightens spectators to how all the characters are ultimately manipulated theatrical objects in his dramatic action.

## 6.6 From Rex to text

Shakespeare’s stagecraft is put under the spotlight at the play’s midpoint during an exchange between the Duke disguised as Lodowick and Lucio through wordplay which draws attention to metatheatrical connotations:

LUCIO It was a mad, fantastical trick of him to steal from the state and usurp the beggary he was never born to. Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence; he puts transgression to’t [...] A little more lenity to lechery would do no harm in him (*Measure for Measure* 3.1.340-344).

The wordplay on “Duke” epitomises the “play within a play” conceit: Vienna’s rightful ruler is playing at being a monk and so “usurping the beggary he was never born to” while Angelo is playing at being Vincentio. The technique creates a distancing effect that is reinforced by an impression of detached authority thanks to the anonymous title “Duke” and fact that Angelo is named whereas Vincentio is not. This disembodied effect is accentuated owing to the use of third person singular and the idea of Lucio being unaware that he is speaking about the Duke to the Duke. The exchange appears to make it clear that the Duke’s physical isolation from his population has meant use-value interaction (“the state”) had been supplanted (“usurp”) by exchange-value commerce (“lechery”).

Authority in the play could thus evoke an artificial commodity belonging to whoever holds it. Like Master Rash’s ginger and brown paper, power has become a poorly used commodity almost leading to the tragedy of Isabella’s seduction, Claudio’s execution, Juliet becoming a widow and their child an orphan. In other words, Shakespeare’s theatrical tricks help the audience see through the shadows by shedding light on Vincentio’s faulty nature. As if to anticipate *The Winter’s Tale*, what was latent in the tragedy becomes blatant in the comedy and Lucio’s impertinent plain speech allows for the vocal exposure of Vincentio’s shadowy commodity scam that is all lies and thieving. It may be for this reason too that Shakespeare has Isabella leave the stage in silence at the end of the play to show that, henceforward, Vincentio’s usurious authority has been out-shadowed. By making it clear that the anthropomorphic deity is the dramatist, not the Duke, Shakespeare also underlines the fictional nature of the play and the notion of the play-as-commodity that ultimately joins together all the components of the

plays where “commodity” appears in the works under discussion. The question of whether aesthetics overpowers ethics, or whether stage business and character manipulation would seem to be more of a case of Shakespeare’s rather than Vincentio’s “craft against vice” (3.2.497), must be addressed, especially in a play where the Duke often seems little more than the dramatist’s means to a happy end for the plot. Scholars including R. C. Bald have underlined how the abundant use of human emotion such as Angelo’s “shock at the discovery of something that he himself is powerless to resist, Isabella’s distress at the dilemma in which she finds herself and, above all, Claudio’s discovery of the horror of death and his pitiful wish to cling to life” is replaced by an almost total “disregard of human feelings throughout the greater part of the final scene” (“Complete Pelican Shakespeare” 357). In much the same way, J. W. Lever notes how the Duke undergoes no “inner development of character and achieves no added self-knowledge” (xciv-xcv), unless he has indeed learned something about himself, although it may have been not what he had set out to learn (Soellner 217). On the other hand, if it can be postulated that if characters and plot are merely exaggerated artifice or fictional commodity, they nonetheless reveal Shakespeare’s skills as a dramatist as well as providing an eloquent statement on the *theatrum mundi* of early modern society as a whole. In this respect, the illusory world of Master Rash’s “commodity” becomes, through a meta-theatrical *mise en abyme*, an efficient miniature to expose and appraise the dystopic sum of humanity and its ongoing search for “self-knowledge, the essential quest in *Measure for Measure*, [and which] was the crowning achievement of the last plays” (Lever xcvi-xcviii).

### **6.7 Commodity and dystopia as a wider cultural ideology**

*Measure for Measure* is thus perhaps one of Shakespeare’s plays where the trope of “the world as a stage” is best exemplified and it is not the “organic medieval-Renaissance state [but a world] wholly composed of lies, colored, counterfeit, and dangerous” (Soellner 229). By virtue of the playwright’s artistry, spectators can grasp all the significance of characters who are playing out roles that they have not themselves invented and that reflect what may be the audiences’ own powerlessness to command their destinies within a mercantilist society. Having broken the mirror of any lasting illusion of agency, Shakespeare has the Duke adopt the role of the common administrator, even lacking the agency to compel Isabella to break her silence at the end of the play. It is as if we have been led backstage and there shown all the theatrical tricks behind the façade of Vincentio’s shadowy performance. He can never again appear as a magical ruler who is able to wield command by a simple sleight of hand but must now ensure a continued “benevolent vigilance” (Soellner 227) and consider actions and reactions when

making decisions in order to guarantee the continuance of his own command. In this way, he is also ultimately akin to Master Rash for his commodity scam, while it has restored a façade of authority, did not go entirely as he had expected: the Duke's power has been undermined and diminished due to commodity. In other words, commodity is henceforth the intermediary through which characters in *Measure for Measure* interact universally and the Duke is no longer the natural leader but has become a "career politician" (Marriot vi).

As such, the Duke's future statesmanship recalls that of another, more overtly scheming Prince. Indeed, in Machiavelli's work, a "Count Lodowick" appears in the third chapter and a rough outline for the play as a whole seems to have been sketched out in the seventh chapter:

When the Duke had possessed himself of Romagna, finding it [...] full of robberies, riots and all manner of insolencies [...] he thought it necessary to provide them a good governor [...] with absolute power, though he was a cruel and passionate man [...]. Afterwards, the Duke, apprehending so large a power might grow odious to the people, he erected a court of judicature in the middle of the province, [...] and because he discovered that his past severity had created him many enemies, to remove that ill opinion, and recover the affection of the people, he had a mind to show that, if cruelty had been exercised, it proceeded not from him but from the arrogance of his minister; and for their further confirmation, he caused the said governor to be apprehended and his head chopped off one morning in the marketplace, [...] This Duke was a man of that magnanimity and prudence, understood so well which way men were to be wheedled, or destroyed, and such were the foundations that he had laid in a short time (Machiavelli 31-33).

Even though Shakespeare has Vincentio prove himself to be a more compassionate counterpart to Machiavelli's example since Angelo is spared the executioner's axe, the play's conclusion can be seen as one where spectators are drawn to reflect upon "the discreditable truth about humanity", in that all humanity is "Machiavellian to one extent or another and that it is a necessity to have some Machiavellian traits in order to survive" (Marriott vii). In other words, *Measure for Measure* can be regarded as a treatise on the "frailty and crossness of our nature" (Machiavelli 70) and the importance of adopting coping strategies to deal with it.

## 6.8 Conclusion

The seemingly simple reference to the commodity of “brown paper and old ginger” is thus emblematic of wide-ranging forms of exchange and use valuations that affect all the characters in the play; everyone seems exposed to commercial risks and returns at all levels of society. The easily recognisable commodity scam affects everyone, influencing even spectators, some of whom may have been naïvely gulled by commodity swindles themselves. Further, this foolhardiness signifies personal deficit but also a wider sense of loss for the community as it challenges the natural order and gives license to inferior commodities that are symbolised in *Measure for Measure* as ginger and brown paper. Due to such ambiguities, the sense of righteous justice that Isabella, a novice initially destined for the nunnery, repeatedly calls for in the final scene of the play is thus most likely a settling of scores on Angelo (for his attempted trade of her virginity for her brother Claudio’s liberty) and not the unexpected wedded partnership with the Duke, which typifies the power of commodity over justice all through:

ISABELLA      Justice, O royal Duke! Vail your regard  
                    Upon a wronged—I would fain have said, a maid.  
                    O worthy prince, dishonour not your eye  
                    By throwing it on any other object,  
                    Till you have heard me in my true complaint,  
                    And given me justice, justice, justice, justice (*Measure for Measure*  
                    5.1.20-25)!

As we have seen, *Measure for Measure*’s turnabout title seems to allude to such substitution from the outset. Thus, the choice of Vincentio’s concluding chiasmus: “What’s mine is yours, and what is yours is mine” (5.1.530), apart from potentially turning Isabella from future nun into a wife, linguistically points to the numerous exchanges and double-dealings: Angelo for the Duke, then the pairs Angelo-Mariana, Claudio-Juliet, Lucio-Kate. The pairs themselves undergo repeated substitutions throughout: Angelo for Vincentio, Mariana for Isabella in the bed-trick, Mariana’s maidenhead, Ragozine’s head for Claudio’s and Ragozine’s head for Barnadine’s. Kiernan Ryan posits that these status-indiscriminate substitutions serve to highlight hypocrisies, such as that of Angelo judging Claudio for a crime that he is guilty of himself, and point to the law as a tool for oppression rather than as truth (227-245); as Pompey says, even “being a bawd is a lawful trade, if the law would allow it” (2.1.202). Following Ryan,

it would seem that the exchanges show mercy to be a means of subjugation rather than magnanimity in the play.

The generic problems in *Measure for Measure* can also be informed by commodities, as evidenced by comments such as Elbow's to the Duke-as-Friar: "Nay if there be no remedy for it but that you will needs buy and sell men and women like beasts, we shall have all the world drink brown and white bastard" (3.1.259-261). Lever says that one of the major impediments to a traditional romantic comedy ending to the play is precisely comments such as Elbow's; and word play such as that on "bastard" (illegitimate offspring or sweet wine) and "drink" in its archaic acceptance of paying the price (82) that can be added to the notion that all the drinking will engender bastards of all races (Kliman and Magnus 53). The remark implies that the only viable value system at work within the framework of the play is the trading of women and men as commodity, as if people from all walks of life were commensurate with goods such as ginger and brown paper. Similarly, Angelo is unable to see that the authority he borrowed should have been meted out rightfully and hence becomes a heedless consumer: he takes the loan at face value. If Vincentio is seen to recover a patriarchal position as head of family and state, his power seems to be increasingly money-driven. Like the streetwise usurer, the Duke's detached judgement has given him a clear-headed flair for opportunity but commodity logic has completely distorted control of human relations.

Finally, commodity, not Vincentio, is the dramatic tool and anthropomorphic character in *Measure for Measure*. It generates, gives impetus to and is the catalytic agent to an agglomerate of micro-fictions, where Master Rash can be Claudio, Pompey, Angelo or even Vincentio. In *Measure for Measure* commodity remains an ongoing debate due to Isabella's silence at its close; after all, we are left unsure over who exactly is being objectified. Moreover, as we began to see in the earlier chapters, if women and men have varying levels of success in resisting pressures towards commodification, women are still seen to be better at negotiating the efforts to commodify them, while male characters often fail to resist commodifying tendencies. I am not suggesting that women were inherently better resisting commodification but, as they had been treated as objects for centuries, they were undoubtedly more used to doing so. While we can "still trace the lines that run from the medieval system" (Knights 22), the evolving moral codes and laws structuring early modern society meant that men now, too, had to adapt to being treated as commodities, but often had inadequate strategies and tactics with which to do so. Chapters Five and Six have shown men as gulls to commodity in civil society, which was a relatively new phenomenon. In Chapter Seven, I turn to the soldier, who, in Shakespeare, can be seen as depicting the end of feudalistic reciprocity among warrior nobility

and the move towards soldier-as-commodity in mass and almost continuous warfare. As Richard Ehrenberg notes, Renaissance warfare had already become a “heavy industry” (375), and was waged essentially by mercenary troops for whose pay cashless Kings and Princes were forced to rely on individual financiers.



- **CHAPTER SEVEN: COMMODITY, SOLDIERS AND THE COMMON CRIMINAL**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The post Armada period was a complicated one for the rank and file English military man. Early modern soldiers were generally thought of as mere commodities, officially conflated with common criminals, singled out by royal proclamation, press ganged into military service; or, if they were lucky enough to have enough money, they could be compelled by unscrupulous officers to bribe their way out of conscription. Shakespeare appears to refuse to present the fictional counterparts of contemporary fighters from a uniquely authoritative viewpoint, however. Soldiers are seen to be beleaguered, exploited, executed as an example to others and sacrificed to the supposedly greater good: the “commodity”, or profit, to be had from conquering foreign lands and their colonisation. In this sense, early modern England was one of the European countries imposing an “alien, artificial exchange-value upon [the] natural, physical use-value” (Hawkes “Theory” 23) of the rest of the world. Logically, the English state thus came to think in chrematistic terms about the soldiers missioned to capture these material possessions. The question seems particularly relevant in Shakespeare’s plays where soldiers and the term “commodities” (*2 Henry VI*) or “commodity”, (*1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*), specifically appears and, more generally, in the first tetralogy, especially *1 Henry VI*. Moreover, all are plays in which the commodification of male soldiers, whether seen as amoral or absurd, criticised and ironised upon, can nonetheless be perceived all the way up the social scale.

In this chapter, I will examine how medieval ideas of mutual confidence and seigneurial ties were gradually being replaced by the monetary representation of England’s armed forces; early modern soldiers already went out into the world after money for themselves or their regent as Wheeler’s *Treatise* discussed earlier shows. As soldiers were selling their time in exchange for wages, their lives, and indeed their identities, also became indistinguishable from the money they were being paid to earn a living. I will thus analyse how the early modern soldier is performed on stage as an exchange-value commodity. I would first like to focus on resistance to loss of agency among poor disbanded soldiers in the context of Cade’s Rebellion (1450), before, still within the framework of the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453), discussing how the idea of men for sale was posited higher up the social scale in early modern England. If in “many of Shakespeare’s plays, the rise to the power of money is identified with and abetted by plebian or bourgeois characters while the old orders of meaning and power are defended by aristocrats” (Hawkes “Theory” 133), I will show, in this chapter and the next, how aristocratic heroes such as John Talbot also share in the societal shift with their subordinates. Even monarchs, in Shakespeare, are ultimately shown as unable to even outwardly uphold a sense of national unity

without being Machiavellian. The plays studied in this chapter thus invite debate over commodity as much as the brothel contexts in Chapter Four. Moreover, the hypocrisy of commanding officers logically led to a certain degree of insubordination. Accordingly, I will also investigate how John Falstaff is able to play the commodity game for a while, before he gets caught out at it and is eclipsed, by Hal, who Shakespeare shows to be a better player.

Discussing the plays in the historical order Shakespeare wrote them allows me to make a tentative claim regarding a historical development in the playwright's thinking about soldiers and ex-soldiers as commodities. The figure of the lower ranking former soldier Jack Cade exposes the idea to criticism and resists it; the socially mobile aristocrat Talbot is made subservient, although he satirises the process; and, the corrupt middle ranking dissembler Falstaff distorts military objectification to his own advantage as long as he is able to. The broad/satiric comic portrayal of Cade and tragic character of Talbot combined may be a possible prototype for the tragi-comic figure of Falstaff to exemplify how soldiers could, at least for a while, resist the process of commodification. If national symbols and myths participate in what Anne Curry calls "the most effective way of creating a sense of national unity behind a king with an uncertain title" (64), Shakespeare's representations of the "Elizabethan stereotype of the [mock] beggar-soldier" (Herman 215) provide a critical counterpart to representations of the stereotype (mock) state hero. As we have begun to see in earlier chapters, Shakespeare significantly replaces ideas of honour as a "personified abstraction" (Charney 90) by notions of commodity at all levels of society. And, where Tillyard, in line with chroniclers such as Hall and Holinshed, portrays soldier-monarchs such as Henry V as a "model of all virtues" ("History Plays" 33), Shakespeare takes a more open-minded approach to early modern concepts of the discredited soldier and the glorified sovereign. Before I further examine the question on Shakespeare's stage, some historical context is first needed.

## **7.2 Post Armada English soldiers on and beyond Shakespeare's stage**

If not militarily after the Armada (1588), Elizabeth was financially brought to her knees when her credit on the continent finally dried up, since the war effort had reduced the country's treasury by £299,000 to £55,000 in just four years (Williams 10). As a result, soldiers who had been demobilised and were still waiting to be paid went as far as trying to sell their armour, a practice that would be repressed by a 1589 royal proclamation *Placing Vagrant Soldiers under Martial Law* in what appears to be an ultimate effort to safeguard national unity: "Her majesty doth [...] hereby notify and rightly charge, that none of these soldiers, pressed as afore, his to her Majesties service, shall sell or lay to pawne, any his or their Armour, furniture, or Apparell

[without] punishment with death by order of Marshall law” (Hughes and Larkin no. 716). Peter C. Herman notes how Elizabethan soldiers, mirrored on Shakespeare’s stage by characters such as Pistol, were commonly recruited from the ranks of the criminal underclass and generally considered to be given to “sedition and rebellion” (211).

Insubordination was perhaps unsurprising as, after being press ganged into overseas duty, soldiers returned home, not to a war pension but to swell the ranks of the dispossessed (Beier 94). Charles Edelman notes how, during the 1587 Low Countries Campaign, “captains regularly discharged any soldier the moment he was no longer fit for action; without question, this was done in order to pocket his wages” (377). It was not until 1589 that the Privy Council took any action to “care” for soldiers. In fact, Elizabeth insisted that the counties look after their own, which meant that soldiers were often paid with inferior goods instead of wages. Added to the general corruption, such practices led to soldiers selling off their armour to feed themselves; “begging at the town’s end” as Brainworm has it in Act 2, scene 3 of Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), was thus a common phenomenon (Edelman 377). The state response, instead of taxation to provide for the returned soldiers, took the form of proclamation. Between 1589 and 1600, no less than seven proclamations deal with vagrancy and every single one cautiously identifies soldiers for reproof, especially the one forbidding soldiers to sell their armour because it assumes that “such vagrants were frauds, only pretending to have served her majesty overseas” (Herman 211).

Elizabeth’s insistence that the soldiers care for themselves was all the more detrimental seeing how she squandered money and men. Further, from the middle ages to the Renaissance, there could be only uncertain colonial gains for near-insured territorial losses. Henry VI had lost all territories on the continent bar Calais by the end of the Hundred Years’ War and John Guy’s estimates reveal how even Elizabeth’s extraordinary military expenditures were insufficient to maintain English expansionism. His details of Elizabeth I’s expenditure to sustain military ostentation, just after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, make this last point very clear:

[S]he spent £144,786 on France in 1589-91; charges in the Netherlands were £100,000 per annum; the Channel guard of seven frigates and four pinnaces cost £1,000 per month; and the expenses of additional summer garrisons in Ireland climbed to £5,000 per month. If, however, expenditure was high in cash terms, manpower costs were exorbitant. The drain on the supply of seamen for service in the navy and aboard privateers was severe, while on land 11,000 English soldiers were killed in France in

less than three years, though only 1,100 fell in battle. The remainder died from plague, insanitary conditions, and shortage of supplies and transport (347).

The scenes of miserable revolt and suffering depicted by Shakespeare in the first tetralogy and the *Henriad* were thus a plausibly fair dramatic reflection of the early modern soldier's condition. Soldiers with names such as "Mouldy, Bullcalf, Wart, Feeble and Shadow" (*2 Henry IV* 3.2) perform the "scarecrows" (*1 Henry IV* 4.2.34) and "tattered rascals" (4.2.57) only "good enough to toss; food for powder" (4.2.58-59); that is, they are only good enough to be tossed on pikes and fed as cannon fodder to the enemy in battle. This is when they were not hung as an example to inspire good behaviour in the rest of the troops, like Bardolph (3.6.35), in *Henry V*, for looting a church in a neighbouring village after the siege of Harfleur (3.3). Many spectators were aware of this topical background and, if they were lucky to survive, soldiers could have very well formed the lower part of the scale in Shakespeare's audience that started with the aristocracy, professional men and officers, moved down through merchants and retailers, craftsmen, workhands and carriers, to end in a category, described by Alfred Harbage as "cashiered soldiers and seamen ashore, as well as vagrants, paupers, thieves and peddlers" (55). The numismatic Philip Grierson, in *The Origins of Money*, notes that this close relationship between person and commodity in conflict had existed since ancient times, for instance as an element of exchange in the codes of conduct of barbarian warriors: "Compensation in the Welsh laws is reckoned primarily in cattle and in the Irish ones in cattle or bondmaids (*cuhmal*), with considerable use of precious metals in both" (20). Informed by Grierson's analysis, the anthropologist David Graeber adds the following:

How is it possible to read this passage without immediately stopping [...] 'Bondmaids'? Doesn't that mean 'slaves'? (It does.) In ancient Ireland, female slaves were so plentiful and important that they came to function as currency [...] isn't the fact that people are using one another as currency at all interesting or significant? [...] It would seem that by the time of the law codes, slave girls were not actually traded, but just used as units of account (128).

These observations allow us to draw a parallel between the Irish *cuhmal* and the rank and file soldier objectified by conscription and called upon to deal with others as exchange-value objects in an increasingly cash nexus society. As such, state authority that asserted an inherent and stable command based on honour could be undermined. If only metaphorically,

Shakespeare's history plays can be read as the staging of this socio-economic instability and a transition from former social codes of seigneurial reciprocity to early modern soldiers being bought and sold or even plying their own trade in any way they could. Thomas More had criticised the "conspiracy of riche men procuring theire owne commodities under the name and title of the commen wealth" (163). Very early on in his career, Shakespeare represents the "miming of greatness" (Orgel "Greatness" 45) through soldier characters from all levels of society by identifying them as "extrinsic and therefore appropriable" (Herman 213). At the same time, he promotes the status of the dispossessed and underprivileged through the soldier's performance of resistance to commodification. To start, I will thus analyse resistance-as-criticism through the window of Jack Cade's Rebellion.

### **7.3 Cade's undermining of an authoritative show of force**

DICK THE BUTCHER    My lord, when shall we go to Cheapside and take up commodities  
upon our bills (2 *Henry VI* 3.1.39-40)?

Jack Cade's was a rebellion that a 1590s theatre-going public could identify with because the people partaking in it and their concerns were very similar to their own. The staging of an insurrection of the lower status layers of English society may also have provided a theatrical counterpoint to the official portrait of patriotic nationalism that had been staged around the Elizabethan defeat of the Armada. It was also an opportune occasion for one of the insurgents to assert frustrated manhood. Indeed, B. J. and Mary Sokol explain Dick the Butcher's above question as "bills" meaning "the rebels' edged weapons, or workmen's tools and mattocks, used to take 'commodities' (goods) by illicit force" (with wordplay on Elizabethan commercial language, where bills are documents and commodities trade goods (59)). Jean E. Howard's interpretation, however, centres on masculinity rather than mercantilism: "And acquire goods on credit or by means of our weapons ('bills'); and rape women, punning on 'commodity' as meaning 'female sexual organs' and 'bills' meaning 'penises'" ("Norton Shakespeare" 303). The interpretations of "commodities" in the play are thus multiple and yet all signify resistance to objectification. First, the word could be a nod to the financial difficulties and a lack of credit facilities that meant the population had to resort to brute force to feed themselves post Armada. Second, the sexual innuendo could reinforce notions of a fragile patriarchal ideology during uneasy times for the staged House of Lancaster, during the Hundred Years' War and just before the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485). Next, the term could signify an economically disrupted early modern England with a (virgin) queen at its

helm. And finally, the word could also have had meaning for audience members who considered that ruling women and foreigners were the cause of their troubles. The polysemy of “commodities” in this instance thus encapsulates precisely the consequences and criticism of “reducing social life and the values that hold it together [...] to a form of chaos” (Drakakis personal communication).

Another useful way of understanding the reasons for Shakespeare’s “commodities” is through the history of the rebellion. When Shakespeare created the play, he knew that his Elizabethan audience would probably be aware of past disorder from Holinshed’s *Chronicles* or John Stow’s *The Chronicles of England* (1580) and that Jack Cade’s was a popular revolt against Henry VI, grouping peasants and small landowners, that originated in the county of Kent in 1450. They were protesting against heavy taxation, forced labour and the seizure of land by nobles to pay for the Hundred Years’ War that had emptied royal coffers while leading to losses, not gains, of French territory. The truce provided by the royal marriage in 1445 of Henry VI to Margaret of Anjou, which had led to the handing over to the French of Maine and Anjou, had been broken in 1449 by two royal favourites, the earl of Suffolk (who had helped organise the unpopular marriage) and the earl of Somerset. Both of the corrupt nobles had already looted the countryside surrounding London, especially Kent, seizing goods as royal “purveyance”: a medieval system used to fund royal tours by purchasing commodities at below their market value but really a byword for legalised theft (McLynn 62-63). This is evidenced by the comprehensive list of deficient commodities drawn up in one item of John Stow’s inventory of the rebels’ complaints in his memoranda on Cade’s rebellion: “Item, taking of wheat and other grains, beef, mutton and other victuals, the which is imputable hurt to the commons, without provision of our sovereign lord and his true council, for his commons may no longer bear it” ( “Chronicles” 98). In Shakespeare, Cade also criticises lack of state provision while the commoners are “in slavery to nobility”:

CADE What Buckingham and Clifford, are ye so brave? [*To the rabble*] And you, base peasants, do ye believe him? Will ye needs be hanged with your pardons about your necks? [...] I though ye would never have given out these arms till you had recovered your ancient freedom. But you are all recreants and dastards, and delight to live in slavery to the nobility. Let them break your backs with burthens, take your houses over your heads, ravish your wives and daughters before your faces. For me, I will make shift for one, and so God’s curse light upon you all (2 *Henry VI* 4.8.163-174).

We know that “noble” also had a financial signification. In Shakespeare’s time, as we saw in Chapter Four, a “noble” was the “principle high-value coin from 1351 to 1464” (Cook 39); that is, it was in circulation during the Hundred Years’ War and Cade’s Rebellion. We can thus imagine that there is a double meaning to “slavery to nobility” (in real serfdom/slaves to money) and the insurgent is resisting both. Indeed, just before the uprising, in 1449, not content with pillaging in their own country, the “nobles” Suffolk and Somerset organised an attack on the Brittany town of Fougères in France, whilst three other royal favourites (Daniel, Tresillian and Saye) launched a piracy mission on a Dutch salt convoy in the Bay of Bourgneuf, in May 1449, giving the French an excuse to resume the costly war and profit from the English presence in Brittany to recover the Norman towns of Coutances and Saint-Lô before the town of Rouen was surrendered in October 1449. In early 1450, the House of Commons refused Suffolk’s request for increased taxation to pay for his mercenary activities and he was involved in another corruption scandal concerning one of his ecclesiastical friends, Bishop Adam Molyens, who stole part of the money intended to finance the Lancastrian Normandy task force and who implicated Suffolk in the fraud before being executed by approximately three hundred angry soldiers and sailors in Portsmouth (McLynn 69). Exasperated by aristocratic and ecclesiastic incompetence, Cade mustered up a group of insurgents (10,000 to 20,000), Suffolk was beheaded and his body thrown on Dover beach in May 1450.

In Shakespeare, Cade accordingly makes the link between a noble’s body and the growing commodified cash nexus of the country that was by then embodied in the collective consciousness:

CADE The proudest peer in the realm shall not wear a head on his shoulders, unless he pay me tribute, there shall not a maid be married, but she pay to me her maidenhead ere they have it. Men shall hold of me *in capite*, and we charge and command that their wives be as free as heart can wish or tongue tell (2 *Henry VI* 4.7.110-115).

More than simply making a link to critique it, however, Cade’s speech inverts the process of the “nobles” commodifying the commoners and he objectifies nobility instead. Jean E. Howard notes how “maidenhead” signifies a “supposed feudal practice by which a lord had the right to sleep with the bride of any of his vassals on the night of the wedding” (“Norton Shakespeare” 302), and “*in capite*” is both a “Latin phrase indicating property held by grant directly from



the king” and wordplay “on ‘*caput*’ (Latin for ‘head’) as slang for ‘maidenhead’” (“Norton Shakespeare” 302). The nobles are thus proclaimed to be financially available to and their wives at the sexual disposal (“free”) of the insurgents.

When Cade actually marched upon London, he caused the king to flee for his life to Kenilworth castle, then the self-proclaimed “Captain of Kent” and his mob executed several of the corrupt government ministers (Lord Saye, who Henry had left to look after London after his flight to Warwickshire; Saye’s son-in-law and Sheriff of Kent; William Crowmer and five other nobles). This was before his mob became so unruly that Londoners, who were themselves exasperated by dishonest administration and who had at first welcomed the rebels, forced them out of the city two days later. Most of the rebels were granted a royal pardon, although Cade, who had also called himself John Mortimer and claimed to be the cousin of Richard, Duke of York (the Mortimers were descendants of the Duke of Clarence, the second son of Edward III), was pardoned in the name of his pseudonym. This fact allowed the loyalists to claim that Jack Cade had never been pardoned. A 1000-mark (approximately £670) bounty was, therefore, put on his head and 500 marks for his chief lieutenants (McLynn 77-79). Cade was mortally injured by the new Sheriff of Kent, Alexander Iden, on July 12<sup>th</sup>, near Heathfield in East Sussex. He died of his wounds the next day.

Jack Cade’s uprising and execution provoked no reform as government abuses continued as before. Cade’s, as Wat Tyler’s Peasants Revolt of 1381 had been, was a revolt not against royalty *per se* but against corrupt government, inefficient land allocation and for tax redistribution in the wake of military action to defend England’s territories (both rebels were competent ex-soldiers). Unlike Tyler’s England, however, Cade’s was a society that was morphing from villeinage into an economically driven cash economy and where former serfs were becoming land tenants at fixed rents. Many peasants had even attained yeoman status and could hope for a then remarkable life expectancy of thirty-five (McLynn 66). They had as much to lose as to win from their disorderly behaviour and Shakespeare’s dramatic interpretation of their historical narrative, through the metaphor of commodity, offers audiences a transposition of meaning that catalyses past and contemporaneous significance to reveal how (ex)-soldiers could resist commodification and weaken authority. How official power is further diminished thanks to the inglorious behaviour of higher status characters as regards the figure of the soldier-rebel is discussed next.

## 7.4 Demonstrating rebellion

Even before Shakespeare, Edward Hall highlights dangerous royal household power imbalances within Henry VI's ruling household that would give rise to rebellion from both without and within. The English king was depicted as gentle and peaceful: "[F]or king Henry, which reigned at this time was a man of meek spirit, and of a simple wit, preferring peace before war, rest before busyness, honesty before profit, and quietness before labour". His French wife, however, was seen as dangerously mannish: "[T]he Queen his wife, [was] desirous of glory, and covetous of honour, policy council, and other gifts and talents of nature belonging to a man". She also wanted to make all the decisions: "This woman perceiving that her husband did not frankly rule as he would [...] determined with herself, to take upon her the rule and regiment bathe of the king and his kingdom" (Irir). Of particular concern was royal spending. Ernest Fraser Jacob notes that the total expenditure of the household of Henry VI, after his marriage to Margaret of Anjou in 1445, became unmanageable. For example, in 1449, it amounted to about £24,000 per annum, for an income of about £5,000 (445). Such inequality was particularly damning for the general population who, having even more to lose than the king, nonetheless had to bear the brunt of much of the taxation to finance royal outlay, sometimes by selling their property. In addition to having the taxes required for wars approved, Henry VI pursued a ruinous domestic policy whose main mission seemed to be to use the public good to maintain his family budget, in opposition to the right-thinking morals of the medieval and Shakespearean periods, with their "insistence on degree and on vocation [and] subordination of private profit to public good" (Knights 156).

Shakespeare's audience, even if they were not acquainted with Hall's work, may have been able to identify with Cade in the aftermath of the costly Armada defeat and its subsequent money shortages. These were comparable to the situation in the mid-1400s, including a flux of bullion to the near east and closure of European mints and mines (McLynn 83). Moreover, household mismanagement would give voice to similar insubordinate masculinity throughout Elizabeth's reign, even from the higher ranks of society. For instance, Robert Devereux (c. 1566-1601), the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex, joined with Drake in the fight against Spain without the Queen's consent in 1589; he secretly married Sir Philip Sydney's widow in 1590, and would later attempt to incite rebellion in London in 1601 (Chisholm 783). There were parliamentary protests against monopolies in 1597-1598. Elizabeth responded by graciously defending her prerogative "which is the chiefest flower in her garland and the principal and head pearl in her crown and diadem". She claimed, moreover, that she had already begun to review offensive grants, "so she promised to continue and that they shall all be examined to abide the trial and

true touchstone of the law” (*Procs.* iii. 242). As we saw earlier, however, in fact very few were cancelled, and new patents continued to be issued (Sgroi para. 2). A clash over royal prerogative was therefore unavoidable. Veteran soldiers living in a cash nexus society probably felt as justified in imagining similar intimidations to Cade’s: to critique and resist objectification.

Cade’s staged rebellion suggests the early modern mindset may still have believed that when the monarch did not behave as a good manager, overestimated revenues gave free rein to the influence of courtiers and abused royal prerogative, rebellion against incompetence and corruption would inevitably follow. Yet, Cade is used as a political commodity by the Duke of York: “And, for a minister of my intent, / I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman, / John Cade of Ashford, / To make commotion, as full well he can, / Under the title of John Mortimer” (3.1.355-359). In addition, Cade also becomes the objectified means to an end for Iden, who earns a ransom, royal preference and a title for having mortally wounded the rebel: “Iden, kneel down. / [*He kneels*] / Rise up a knight. / We give thee for reward a thousand marks, / And will that thou henceforth attend on us” (5.1.78-80). Instead of glorifying crown authority however, Iden’s cash prize for Cade’s murder would have further driven home the objectified condition of soldiers and honoured the rebels rather than royalty. After all, the corruption continued, the impact of Cade’s revolt was tiny (Henry went back on his promises) and the rebels were punished (York hung and burned the insurgents despite the pardons).

Cade’s utopian tirade: “I thank you good people! – There shall be no money. All shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery that they may agree like brothers, and worship me their lord” (4.2.67-69) must have appeared less of a rebellious call for an upturning of the social order than an ambivalent nod to More’s “conspiracy of riche men” that was still seemingly work in progress. In the next section I analyse how even rich soldiers, such as Talbot, are nonetheless represented as victims of commodification in Shakespeare’s theatre. I will begin by demonstrating how the commodity of empire was particularly visible in Elizabeth I’s own military showmanship despite her use of mythic emblems; then, I will show how soldiers comply with mercenary precepts and cope with their subjugation, even if at the same time Shakespeare includes pointed satire on the battlefield chaos caused by commodity (including that associated with England’s patron saint George) and perhaps even a call for its reconsideration.

### **7.5 Tilbury and the *mise-en-scène* of myths**

The staging of Cade’s sedition indeed went against the spirit and intent of the Tudor State, whose rulers sought to assert physical integrity as the guarantor of the structural integrity

of the two bodies of the monarch. Conflating patriarchal analogies of kingly and fatherly authority, Elizabeth I's public image was that of the strong "virgin queen" soldier. In this respect, the explicit reference to her male body in the discourse attributed to the Queen in August 1588, in Tilbury, as her army was about to confront 17,000 enemy soldiers on the other side of the Channel (Frye 96), was more than a rhetorical gesture. Whether it is the version attributed to William Leigh: "[T]he enemy may perhaps challenge my sex for that I am a woman, so may I likewise charge their mold for that they are but men" (93-94), or the one that appears in a letter from Leonel Sharp to the Duke of Buckingham: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and Stomach of King, and of a King of England too, and I think Foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any Prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my Realm" 373), her queenly manhood reflects the importance of authority.

It also emphasises the early modern vision of how to confront the common enemy, here the armed forces of the Duke of Parma and the Spanish Armada. Yet, because of financial difficulties, the embodiment by Elizabeth of a physically virile Protestant English stance against a Catholic empire (which could be represented either by Spain or by France) was obscured by her being the figurehead of a nation that had been ravaged for years by costly religious cleavages. As such, Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury seems essentially to have served causes subsequent to the victory against the Armada. Susan Frye reminds us that the paintings at the time of the conflict focused on the image of the Queen as an ambassador of reconciliation: "[C]ontemporary representations of the victory [are] that of an empress who prefers peace to war [...] like the William Rogers engraving, *Eliza Triumphans* (1589), which represents the Queen in possession of an empire but carrying an olive branch" (108). The problem was not so much the representation but the legitimacy of her power. The devaluation of the financial supremacy of the queen, along with successive proclamations that reflected a denial of social consciousness, had erased any possibility for authority, whatever the role taken.

Flaunting herself in representation as a soldier proved only to be a hollow performance in a *mise-en-scène* of a myth of military supremacy. Symbols such as the empire or the olive branch were intended to enable compatriots to celebrate their past, present and hopes for a successful future community. Through the use of signs that were easily identifiable to both nationals and foreigners, the state intended to bring together people so that they felt they belonged to the same nation. Such emblems were visible reminders of a nation's values or ideals, yet their role went beyond the frontiers of truth to give a biased version of history and potentially discredit the monarch. As audiences suspected as much, they could potentially present a clear threat to authority. More worrying was that Shakespeare's characterisation of

soldiers such as the Earl of Shrewsbury, John Talbot, as a moneyed commodity links low and high-status awareness and potential resistance since it raises the “subaltern group from anonymity to the same status as royalty” (Herman 2013). Accordingly, I will next discuss how the performance of Talbot, a soldier connected to well-known battles and who emphasises the idea of loyalty and resistance against invaders during the Hundred Years’ War, nonetheless acknowledges commodification and participates in its cash nexus system, yet not without satirising it.

### **7.6 Performing Talbot to challenge myth**

In the first play of the first tetralogy Shakespeare immortalises the character of the first Earl of Shrewsbury (a title awarded in 1442), also the first Earl of Waterford, Lord John Talbot, Constable of France (1387-1453). His father, Richard Talbot, fourth Baron Talbot, had died in 1397 when John was only ten and the boy spent most of his life fighting on the battlefields afterwards. He was well-known for his aggressive attitude, notably in defense of his own interests in his home county of Shropshire in 1413, or in neighbouring Herefordshire in 1422-1423. His belligerent character was put to even more profitable use by the Lancastrian monarchs. He probably battled alongside Henry IV against the Percys at Shrewsbury (1403), definitely did so in the Welsh wars before being appointed to the position of lieutenant of Ireland (1415-1419) by Henry V, who would later call him home to fight the French in the Hundred Years’ War, which had flared up again in 1415. He also famously participated in many sieges of French towns, including Meaux (1421), where Henry V later died of dysentery in 1422.

After the infant king Henry VI’s ascension to the throne, Talbot was encouraged to continue fighting in France by Henry V’s brother, the Duke of Bedford, and regained Maine for the English in 1427-1428. He was unable, however, to keep a stronghold on Orleans, as that had been recovered by Joan of Arc and the French forces, now under the control of Charles VII. Talbot was captured as prisoner for four years in Patay (1429), after which his father-in-law, the Baron Furnival, negotiated an exchange for his freedom. Joan was burnt at the stake in 1431, Bedford was killed in 1435 and English losses subsequently far outweighed French ones. By 1450, the only remaining English possession was Calais (until 1558). In 1453, Charles VII moved forces into Gascony to provoke an ultimate battle with Talbot at Castillon. The English lost, most probably due to a by now outdated style of warfare and the innovative French use of cannon fire. The formerly invincible Talbot was killed there along with his son John, at the

same time putting an end to a medieval legend, English rule in the Duchy of Aquitaine, and the Hundred Years' War (Pollard "Talbot").

Despite gaining immense personal profit due to his martial expertise in real life, Talbot is generally thought to have been figured by Shakespeare as an embodiment of the altruistic values of medieval knighthood (Chernaik 28-31). His appearances in *1 Henry VI* are indeed centered around some of the most tragically moving, if historically inaccurate, French episodes of his military career as if to emphasise this impression: in the play he is captured at Patay, immediately ransomed, not by his father-in-law, but by Bedford to combat the French with the English forces at the time-compressed sieges of Orleans (1428-1429) (2.2) and Rouen (1418-1419) (3.2), including some symbolic single combat with Joan La Pucelle. This is before he is captured again to be ridiculed by the French, see his son die in battle (4.7) and then expire, not in 1453, but after being deserted by the dukes of York and Somerset (4.7), who are more concerned with venting their mutual animosity (4.3 and 4.4) than saving Talbot's life. Shakespeare's fictional show of destructive aristocratic infighting in France allows for a fluid connection to the story of the Wars of the Roses in the next two episodes of the tetralogy whilst serving as a foil to Talbot's noble military competence. It also highlights the hero's virtue and sacrifice when he capitulates to Joan in a symbolic reminder in what seems to be a shift from a period championing an ideal of loyal service to that of egotistical self-fashioning (Cairncross "Arden Shakespeare" 29). If Shakespeare's changing history for dramatic effect creates the myth of a war hero, it also has the effect of highlighting how Talbot was objectified with an exchange value that arises not from any of his inherent natural properties but was imposed upon him from the outside.

Alternatively, Talbot is also one of a set of related characters who appeared from very early on in Shakespeare's plays. The character type appears frequently enough to form a perceptible group, that of the archetypal dominant self-seeking English male hero. Knights notes how there was an increased intensity of national feeling in England just before and after the Armada with more than a hundred and fifty chronicle plays being staged between 1562 and 1642. He adds that the plays were not so much designed to stabilise accepted social attitudes but provide more or less reliable information to hold up examples and invigorate a sense of community to show audiences supposedly virtuous and somewhat idealised version of themselves onstage. Like the Chorus of *Henry V* (a post-dated, and thus even more unreliable, dramatic technique to comment upon Henry's artful action and thus enable it to transcend the theatre) Shakespeare deliberately constructs the "political arena as a stage" and frames the character "as an actor responding to an audience" (Shack 22).



Knights notes too that chronicle plays were motivated by a new interest in the English past, “when political circumstances made it inevitable that they should not be disinterested dramatic accounts of past time but direct incitements to patriotic feeling, propaganda designed to make one Englishman feel that he was really as good as three Spaniards” (244): Talbot, Petruchio or Henry V, for instance, all share characteristics communicated orally, by gestures or images and easily identifiable key words that reflect a shared understanding of early modern English manhood. Despite Petruchio’s Italian name, we can regard him as “in many ways an Englishman”; that is, endowed with courage, filial relationships and “the firm, and if necessary, cruel mastery of wife and servant” (Howard “Norton Shakespeare” 162).

At the same time, Shakespeare does not only present conventional moralities but he also clearly explores the full significances of these moralities at a time when the charitable ideal was not sufficient to meet the social problems of the age and the medieval traditions of neighbourliness were being replaced by uncharitable individualism. For example, Talbot can also be compared to the fortune hunting Petruchio and the no less mercenary Henry, who spectators see adopting methods proper to his usurping father, Henry IV. These include the avoidance of civil war due to exactions by attempting to take back land in France with, for instance, the capture of Harfleur (*Henry V* 3.3), the battle of Agincourt (4.3 and 4.7) or the “capital demand” (5.2.96) for the hand of Katherine, the daughter of Charles VI and, by extension, the French empire. Sigurd Burckhardt notes how Talbot seems to have two personalities (174), perhaps a sign of the equivocal nature of the early modern English soldier: both courageous subject and mastered object that can be extended to the group as a whole (Petruchio is arguably mastered to some extent by his own manipulative Catherine and Henry cannot ever seem to escape the usurpation of Richard II’s crown). Shakespeare’s Talbot is, therefore, also emblematic of a “developing awareness of a disjunction between essence and appearance” (Hawkes “Theory” 172) that corresponds to the English mercantilist process.

While he actively participates in the system, Talbot is nonetheless revealed to satirise it. One manner in which the character critiques commodification and Elizabethan military maneuvering is the verbal joust that Talbot wins against the Countess of Auvergne (*1 Henry VI* 2.3). The Countess initially belittles her English opponent “Is this the scourge of France? / Is this the Talbot, so much feared abroad” (2.3.15-16). He thus presents himself to physically certify proof of his dominant masculine virility: “Talbot is but shadow of himself? / These are his substance, sinews, arms and strength, / With which he yoketh your rebellious necks, / Razeth your cities and subverts your towns / And in a moment makes them desolate” (2.3.62-66). When she capitulates, he tropes his prevailing manhood in terms reminiscent of Petruchio or Henry:



TALBOT      Be not dismayed, fair lady; nor misconster  
                  The mind of Talbot, as you did mistake  
                  The outward composition of his body.  
                  What you have done hath not offended me;  
                  Nor other satisfaction do I crave,  
                  But only, with your patience, that we may  
                  Taste of your wine and see what cates you have;  
                  For soldiers' stomachs always serve them well (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.74-80).

Like the generic soldier-seducer, James A. Riddell observes how Talbot's "body is merely an image of his soul, and the entire Talbot is merely a representation of his army", that is, "merely a representation of the King and commonwealth of England. [...] God's agent and the agent of his land" (54). Conceptions of dominant masculine power are thus ostensibly regimented through a male appropriation of mental and physical terrain on stage. Yet, the passage can also be seen as a spoof on Elizabeth I's illusory stance at Tilbury (an apparent physical weakness set against an intrinsic spiritual authority), with what may especially be an enlightening joke at the expense of the royal "stomach". Shakespeare thus uses his wit to subvert the Tilbury myth and distance himself from a model where the commodity, which turns men as well as women into moneyed objects, becomes a collective ideology.

Talbot serves as a touchstone with which to valorise the human nature of the soldier in his concerns over being ransomed by Bedford:

TALBOT      The Duke of Bedford had a prisoner,  
                  Called the brave Lord Ponton de Santrilles;  
                  For him was I exchanged and ransomèd.  
                  But with a baser man-of-arms by far  
                  Once in contempt they would have bartered me—  
                  Which I, disdaining, scorned; and craved death,  
                  Rather than I would be so pilled esteemed.  
                  In fine, redeemed I was, as I desired (*1 Henry VI* 1.4.5-12).

James A. Riddell suggests Talbot is here "the magnanimous man, the hero who scorns to be valued at less than his worth" (54). Here, we can thus say that Shakespeare is playing on

evolutions in early modern lexicon to reveal the slippage towards notions of soldiers as commodity. The lexical field of medieval trade (“exchanged”, “ransomed”, “bartered”, “esteemed”, “desired”) suggests so. This is especially made clear as Talbot will later codify his impending recapture both in terms of Renaissance bestiary (French “hounds”, English “deer”) and early modern commerce (“dear” with a play on words beloved/expensive, “sell”): “Turn on the bloody hounds with heads of steel / And make the cowards stand aloof at bay. / Sell every man his life as dear as mine / And they shall find dear deer of us, my friends” (4.2.51-54) (Burns “Arden Shakespeare” 50). Words such as “dear” referred both to subjective emotion (“esteemed”, “desired”) and to exchange (“exchanged”, “ransomed”). The ambiguous simultaneity of the term’s meaning, while it “gave a particular poignancy to the many depictions of prostitution on the early modern stage” (Hawkes “Theory” 106), also sharply renders the objectified condition of the soldier in this instance. The character of Sir William Lucy later uses the same market connoted vocabulary in the past tense, as if to signify Talbot’s total objectification: “Whither, my lord? From bought and sold Lord Talbot, / Who, ringed about with bold adversity, / Cries out for noble York and Somerset” (4.4.13-15). Moreover and full of young generation clarity, Talbot’s son glumly sums up the commodification of soldiers from all levels of society with nearly the same commercial terms: “On that advantage, bought with such a shame, / To save a paltry life and slay bright fame” (4.6.43-44), suggesting that the safety (“advantage”) of a self-fashioned glory (“brought with such a shame”) had by now outweighed notoriety of a more heroic sort (“bright fame”). As such, the nation was no longer defended in a spirit of shared historical values but by trading soldiers as exchange goods around a myth created by glorified emblems and legends.

The pressing of soldiers as commodities in the Second Tetralogy provides an even clearer example of manipulating representation of objectified soldiers. In the first two sections of this chapter I have discussed how soldiers have resisted and coped with commodification; here, I examine its comic distortion. My chronological progression has also mapped status concerns: the lowly (ex) soldier-rebel Cade anticipates the mercenary-cum-aristocrat Talbot to culminate in the socially mobile middle ranking Knight, Falstaff. Accordingly, I last examine the objectification of the military and its manipulation midway between the ruling classes and the “tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks” Falstaff seems to have unloaded “from all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies” (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.31-33). Undeniably, the temporarily elect knight abuses his office and favour from Prince Hal at court to treat his fellow Englishmen as commodity. Falstaff is unaware, however, that he will

also become an object of exchange and his friendship evaluated in market terms when it is abandoned by the dissembling heir to the throne.

### **7.7 Falstaff's commodity of good names and warm slaves**

FALSTAFF    Thou hast the most unsavoury similes and art indeed the most comparative, rascalliest, sweet young prince. But, Hal, I prithee, trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. An old lord of the council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.70-77).

In *1* (and *2*) *Henry IV* Falstaff's comic comments on how his military status can be put to profitable personal advantage provide a critical observation on the corruption of the early modern military. In the period, this corruption could include "the captain's practice of withholding pay from their soldiers, not allowing them to buy their own food, but instead forcing them to eat the substandard victuals the captains provided" (Edelman 272). Falstaff's swindles hence include illicit activities that would undoubtedly have prompted parallels for audiences with officially reprehensible activities such as the unsanctioned selling of amour. They also expose the sham of public proclamations, the frequency of which, as we saw earlier, parallel the number of Falstaff's criminal acts. Shakespeare's focus on Falstaff's illicit activities, including supplying himself with creditworthy reputation ("good names"), loans of money or bribes extirpated so that able-bodied men may leave the army without serving in it, is particularly emphatic. His jest about reputation in the section's epigraph, moreover, introduces the more cynical purchase of a "commodity" of soldiers.

Indeed, he boasts of the abuse of office and the "commodity of warm slaves" (4.2.16-17) to Bardolph: "I have got in exchange of one hundred and fifty soldiers three hundred odd pounds" (4.2.12-14) and declares that he is not ashamed of misusing the commission for conscripting officers (4.2.10-11). Above all, Falstaff notes how most of the conscripts are "unjust servingmen" (4.2.25) or "out of prison" (4.2.37). To excuse his own corruption, he claims the men are contemptible comfort-loving idlers. They all pay him bribes except Francis Feeble, who, as a ladies' tailor, is too "womanish" to be able to become a soldier (Edelman 389), since only those who were too poor to buy their way out of the army had to serve. As such, armies were made up of the dregs of society and Falstaff's "whole charge" in Act 4, scene

2, would have been unable to resist a charge of any sort (Edelman 85). Falstaff's callous manipulation of the rank and file soldier both belittles the victim and debases the corrupt state representative (little more than a common criminal) to highlight the abject cold-heartedness of the early modern state military and the idea that the crown did not enjoy the full support of the English people since they were compelled to fight rather than volunteer. This is what Shakespeare represents when he has Falstaff explain how he has taken bribes or pressed the dregs of the English countryside into military service. The representation satirises how beholden to an unethical model Elizabethan society had become.

Falstaff's dishonesty continues in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. As a master and a gentleman, Justice Robert Shallow threatens to prosecute his former law school companion, when the latter admits to poaching the former's deer, breaking into his property and assaulting his servants. Yet the pompous state representative of law and order only serves as a foil rather than a frustration to Falstaff's misdemeanours. Shallow is amazed that the knight, just above him in rank, could lower himself to commit the offenses: "Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge" (1.1.92). He thus endeavours to reassure himself by using his full title and the third person: "I will make a Star-Chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, Esquire" (1.1.1-3). However, Shallow is ridiculed when Falstaff does "abuse" his function by daring Shallow to do so. The knight even takes it upon himself to make a mockery of the law through a play on words ("Council", "counsel") that further derides the justice of the peace's credibility. When Shallow threatens "The Council shall know this" (1.1.99) Falstaff retorts: "'Twere better for you if it were known in counsel. You'll be laughed at" (1.1.100-101). Both state authority through law and order and the noble behaviour traditionally associated with social rank are ridiculed through the performance of Falstaff and Shallow. England was a country where increasingly landless peasants had limited choices except poaching, as seen here, or wage labour. David McNally estimates that 40 percent of English peasants were pressed into wage labour by 1640 ("Global Slump" 150). Shakespeare's representations of being pressed into military service, or poaching as means of survival (or a way to mock the establishment) probably had very strong topical connotations for his audiences, who would have lived through such experiences themselves.

The symbol of the highly important patron soldier saint of England, Saint George, was another way in which easily recognisable emblems were used to highlight the abject condition of the male soldier in Shakespeare. In connection with Falstaff, moreover, the symbol was recreated in a manner perhaps not quite as spectators would have expected, since instead of glorifying the rank-and-file soldier's status, the religious character represents instead his

objectification. Writing at the beginning of the third century A.D., Eusebius of Caesarea first acquaints readers with an anonymous soldier of noble birth beheaded by Diocletian at Nicomedia on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 303. Over the next two hundred years the Eastern Church apocryphal Acts tell of St George, the martyr, a tribune in the Roman army, who was executed for his protests against Diocletian's persecution of Christians. The formerly unknown soldier quickly became a revered example of courage in defence of the poor, the defenceless and the Christian faith all over Christendom (Collins para 1). He became known as "megalomartyros" and churches were dedicated to him in Jerusalem and Antioch in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The cult took on larger proportions during the crusades because his vision was said to have preceded the fall of Antioch in 1068 and the defeat of the Saracens on the first crusade.

George was declared the patron saint of soldiers by Richard I when campaigning in Palestine in 1191-1192, his feast was declared a lesser holiday in 1222 and the Order of the Garter was instigated under his patronage by Edward III in 1348, for which the chapel of Saint George at Windsor was built by Edward IV and Henry VII (Farmer 181). The red cross of Saint George the martyr on a white background was adopted for the uniform of English soldiers, later to become England's flag (Collins para 4). When the character of Henry V commands "Cry 'God for Harry! England and Saint George!'" (*Henry V* 3.1.34) at Harfleur, he is invoking, in T. W. Craik's words, "God for Harry's cause! Saint George for England's victory!" (204). Within this framework, like Elizabeth's show at Tilbury, the public spectacle constructed through speech and costume was intended to stress both the individuality of the king and a universal understanding supporting "England", a persona constructed by virtue of the services of the common soldier and metonymically represented by Saint George. The king is honoured in both cases since God and the military are to support his private and public bodies ("Harry", "England") whereas his army, in this instance, is relegated to the status of an anonymous mass; indeed, George's slaying of the dragon was re-created "on the many 'George and Dragon' inn signs of Elizabethan England" (Edelman 291) as suggested in Faulconbridge's "Saint George that swung the dragon, and e'er since / Sits on horseback at mine hostess' door" (*King John* 2.1.288-289).

Nonetheless, like the myth of Tilbury, the symbol of Saint George could be parodied and undermined. For instance, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, whilst reminiscing about time in law school with Falstaff, Shallow remarks: "O, Sir John, do you remember since we lay all night in the Windmill in Saint George's Field?" (3.2.179-180), evoking a windmill existing near Southwark that had given its name to a tavern or that had itself been turned into a brothel (Melchiori "New Cambridge Shakespeare" 126). Instead of the symbol of Saint George

embodying virtuous, codified state authority and being designed to create a sense of national identity, the symbol had thus become, by Elizabeth's reign, an emblem of a place of unlawful sinning. Much like the associations inherent to the term "dear" concerning Talbot discussed earlier, mention of Saint George would have evoked the common conception of prostitution and the generic soldier (since Falstaff was on stage) for audiences. While Henry V would use "the Christian warrior of the third century, [as] a symbol for all his soldiers" (Jones 47-48), and military ordinances were drawn up to compel Henry's men to wear a large red cross on their front and back at all times as both a recognisable uniform and a common cause, Shakespeare associates England's patron saint with Saint George's Field, which was "known as a market for sex" (Howard "Norton Shakespeare" 1372).

Moreover, "Windmill" was most probably a name for a brothel, as hinted at by Shallow's mention of the time he spent there with "Jane Nightwork" (3.2.184), "whose name no doubt signalled her profession" (Bulman 306). Falstaff ostensibly attempts to safeguard against the recollection: "No more of that, good Master Shallow, no more of that" (3.2.181-182). Nonetheless, the perspective has been reversed: Shallow has undermined the intended meaning of Saint George by linking England's righteous warrior emblem and commodified sex, thus unwittingly destabilising authority as he does so. Falstaff's manipulation of his status further reflects the state's mismanagement of authority and imposes what David Hawkes calls "sameness on difference" ("Theory" 97); nobles may be qualitatively different from lower ranking individuals in society but the act of commodification renders things equivalent. In a military world epitomised by authority but where authority had been totally destabilised due to commodity, a soldier could thus resort to abuses as long as he could get away with it, as I now demonstrate.

### **7.8 Making commodity from diseases**

In 2 *Henry IV*, Falstaff and his companions' illicitly profitable activities in the secondary plot become increasingly prominent: they take up 1422 lines to the historical plot's 1760, which is a proportion of five to four and almost exactly the reverse of 1 *Henry IV* with 1649 lines to 1305 (Chester "Pelican Shakespeare" 279). As the low degree swindles are situated mainly in Quickly's tavern, they carry with them a strong thematic undercurrent of prostitution, which we just saw was put on a par with soldiering. If the scams seem almost entirely removed from the principal action in the play, they nonetheless act as a chorus to contrast with and comment upon the high degree, but no less profitable, register of the main subject of kingly succession. Moreover, Falstaff at one point even asserts his own self in quantitative terms, when he tries to

take advantage of a pretend war-wound. He seeks to gain a pension from the state, when, in fact, all he has is gout from too much sack; his condition is worsened by his walking since Prince Hal and Poins have stolen and hidden his horse (*1 Henry IV* 2.2.2). Notwithstanding, Falstaff is determined with a “good wit [to] make use of anything [and] turn diseases to commodity” (*2 Henry IV* 1.2.228). By doing so, he also exemplifies how exchange-value commodity could paradoxically create use value.

Since it can only resist his own objectification in the short term, however, Falstaff’s wit communicates the uncertainty of the early modern mercantilist model. James C. Bulman argues that Falstaff’s manipulative wordplay represents “a strategy for survival” (“Arden Shakespeare” 58); and, since it does not succeed, Falstaff’s tactics can be seen to bear the burden, or provide a foil for, Henry V’s ascension. Falstaff’s idolatry of Hal seems motivated by his personal vanity and pursuit of advancement, which the Machiavellian Prince simply transfers to his own advantage before becoming king. David Hawkes comments that because Shakespeare wrote for the purpose of profitable commodity exchange, his plays needed to appeal to the “groundlings”, who stood in the theatre’s cheapest sections and who demanded “lowbrow, knockabout comedy featuring plebian characters” (“Theory” 61). But surely even the poorly informed could have seen the uncertain gains to be had from commodity since Hal’s repudiation of Falstaff (*2 Henry IV* 5.5.41-47) is essentially destined to consolidate the power of the king in the making (Howard “Norton Shakespeare” 1329).

As such, Falstaff focusses attention on the future king’s own “marketplace of deception and disguises” (Grady 181). The repudiation scene significantly stimulates a jolting acknowledgement of all the stamina and imagination necessary to allocate oneself “social validity [as well as] commercial value” (Karremann 113). My study of the progression of Shakespeare’s representation of the soldier from the first tetralogy to the second has revealed how all-out resistance and rebellion evolves into rueful submission and then to an uncertain short-term manipulation of the figure of the soldier-as-commodity. Indeed, a soldier’s existence was just like the aleatory trajectory of Faulconbridge’s weighted bowl or the inn-sign representing Saint George that swung any way the wind desired to take it. While the soldier-king in the making is seen to clinch a victory over Falstaff, Shakespeare’s representation of Hal’s disloyalty and dishonourable conduct diminishes faith in command rather than consolidating it; it rather objectifies the monarch, who appears to prostitute himself thanks to his own commodity idolatry.



## 7.9 Conclusion

If Shakespeare's staged references to soldiers-as-commodity seem particularly disparaging, they are only the expansion of a discourse where a person could be a common soldier, a sovereign, a commodity up for exchange, or all three things all at once. Moreover, the soldier as represented by the playwright performs the sad truth of men like Falstaff's scarecrows or Cade's disbanded soldiers having been traded in a military context for centuries. Such depiction, in turn, affords Shakespeare opportunities for an ambiguous performance of command. Mythic emblems such as that of Elizabeth at Tilbury or Saint George on the Shakespearean stage can thus signal authoritative defeat rather than its victory. In *1 Henry VI* the Duke of Bedford, Regent of France, employs the image of England's patron saint to attempt to reinstate authority after the news of Lord Talbot's imprisonment: "Bonfires in France forthwith I am to make, / To keep our great Saint George's feast withal. / Ten thousand soldiers with me I will take. / Whose bloody deeds shall make all Europe quake" (1.1.153-156).

The audience could have grasped deeper meanings however. Former Saint George feasts had included the York one in 1554, where England's ultimate hero was accompanied by a dragon, Saint Christopher, a mock-king and a mock-queen and a "May" (Hutton 98), suggesting disorderly merrymaking rather than dignified endeavour. Talbot, although supported by the schematised force of Saint George and "ten thousand soldiers" that serve as an indicator of Henry's promised victory, thus catalyses instead the early modern king's weakness and possible downfall. Sir William Lucy, expressing bewilderment and frustration at Talbot's death, explicitly refers to Saint George, of whose "noble order" (4. 7. 68) Talbot was a knight. Mentions of the saint in *1 Henry VI*, as elsewhere, indicate incoherent and ambivalent representations of royal authority, pointing audiences to how Henry or Elizabeth neglected their responsibilities as head of the household and the commonwealth and yet evoked, through symbols and emblems, respect for the past, kinship and a sense of belonging to a land, and thus to a community or a nation.

On the other hand, Shakespeare continues to refurbish and give credibility to the subaltern despite, or perhaps because of, his calculating superiors. Although rebellions are quashed, and war heroes are slain by opponents, it is the soldier who finally claims the most legitimacy. Representations of the soldier through the character of Cade or Talbot thus clearly indicate an incoherent and ambivalent representation of official power, pointing audiences to how monarchs systematically neglect their social responsibilities. How this would, in turn, allow Shakespeare to represent kings as mere commodified performers on a stage sporting a vulgar stage-prop crown is discussed in Chapter Eight.

- **CHAPTER EIGHT: REPRESENTING THE VULGAR THROUGH THE COMMODITY OF THE CROWN**

### **8.1 Introduction**

PRINCE HAL [T]hou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou whoreson, obscene, greasy tallow catch (*1 Henry IV* 2.5.209-211).

In this last chapter, I will demonstrate how Shakespeare represents the undermining of traditional kinds of authority, especially nobility, associated with kingship through the commodity of the crown. Prince Hal, the future Henry V, is paradoxically shown to be as vulgar as Falstaff, the character who he calls the “clay-brained guts, [...] knotty-pated fool, [...] whoreson, obscene, greasy tallow catch”. Hal, who has been drinking in Mistress Quickly’s lowbrow London tavern, is mocking Falstaff, who has been attempting to make up lies about how he was robbed by roughly a hundred men of the money he had just stolen himself. Hal’s name-calling attempts to characterise and socially control Falstaff and all that he represents (notably “greed and folly” (Burelbach 19)) as his vulgar inferior. The problem is that Hal, although he seems to transcend vulgar limitations when he becomes Henry V and conqueror of France owing to his victory at the battle of Agincourt (1415), is in fact no model of noble human conduct, in the sense that C. S. Lewis notes:

A word like nobility begins to take on its social-ethical meaning when it refers not simply to a man’s status but to the manners and character which are thought to be appropriate to that status. But the mind cannot long consider those manners and that character without being forced on the reflection that they are sometimes lacking in those who are noble by status and sometimes present in those who are not. Thus from the very first the social-ethical meaning, merely by existing, is bound to separate itself from the status-meaning (22).

Following Lewis, we can say that appropriate “manner” is meaningful in deciding upon whether a character is noble or vulgar regardless of status. As such, if kings in Shakespeare’s plays are often shown to adopt heroic, good and noble, manners, the playwright’s widely recognised complex representation of royalty also allows monarchs to be performed as hypocrites and willing participants in the new mercantilist commodity model.

I argue that Henry V can be seen as uncouth, shown to treat the crown as an expedient exchange good to sustain his reign thanks to trickery and showmanship and, by extension, turn

monarchy itself into vulgar commodity, which is the aspect of Shakespeare's portrayal of kingship in the history plays I examine here. We have seen the playwright providing a piercing analysis of how commodity had completely distorted human relations and how completely Shakespeare came to acknowledge the controversial role of money in representing both men and women as objects. Here I further demonstrate the ubiquity of commodity, to the supreme heights of the state, through lexical analysis of a single word: crown. To explain the phenomenon, I first discuss how "vulgar" as Henry's condition of being brings him down to a level of a cash nexus object, and then continue with an etymological study of "crown" and its numismatic meanings to show how Henry's vulgarity can be represented through state symbol. I also examine how Henry is presented as a potentially duplicitous character, since Shakespeare builds ideas of him hypocritically gaining only in face value, a reference to the practice at the time of minting coins with an inscription guaranteeing their weight, so the worth of the coins became based on their face-value rather than on the actual weight of the precious metal contained in the coin. Next, I explain how the *double entendre* already existing in the term "crown" (royal regalia and common coin) also meant that Shakespeare could represent Henry as simultaneously authoritative and "vulgar". Finally, I will examine how Shakespeare breaks all illusion of regal supremacy and represents Henry as merely a commodified actor parading in his crown. Indeed, in what H. R. Coursen calls "a world drained of intrinsic value" (3-4) and where, as Sigurd Burckhardt notes "There are no guarantees, only the risk and will – the need – to order" (184-85), the playwright uses metaphor, as Sandra K. Fischer observes, to redeem royal debts, fix new identities and reestablish value, as well as institutionalising a whole "set of structural foils that make behaviours [...] more readily understood" (126). In my discussion of notions of the "vulgar" in *Henry V*, I will thus analyse the process by which the medieval model of honour (uprightness, commitment to legitimacy) becomes subordinate to the imperatives of opportunist strategy (duplicity, ignominious conduct) and Shakespeare provides spectators with a metacritical distance with which to analyse the king and his vulgar performance of authority.

As we saw in *King John*, the Bastard Faulconbridge, the illegitimate son of Lady Faulconbridge and Richard Cœur-de-Lion (either a complete invention of Shakespeare's or a character perhaps borrowed from an earlier morality called *King Johan* (c. 1540)), explains how "commodity" is personified as an expedient "broker" in the pursuit of gain in the claim to the French crown. As such, anybody's behaviour can comprise social characteristics considered "vulgar" (in the early modern sense of "commonplace") and the vulgarity can be represented across the social scale; even the king can behave in an opportunistic, unseemly manner, like the bowl that is steered off its proper course, under the weight of its "bias" (money), which is

Shakespeare's way of representing commodity, or profit-seeking "expediency" in that play. Further, as *King John* is a play first performed at approximately the same time as *Richard II*, where the deposition of the rightful king (Richard) is performed by the "seizing" (4.1.173) of his crown by a vulgar usurper (Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV), I argue that the "crown" is the commodity/stage property that serves as a visual broker on stage to capture the vulgar expediency in everybody.

Early modern theatre needed easily identifiable stage props so that even the least educated spectator could comprehend what was happening. Shakespeare goes further in his use of words and visual effects alluding to the crown by associating the king with the commoner at a time when sanctified medieval kingship was being replaced by a new monarchy of mercantile strategy and manipulation. I argue, moreover, that the vulgar in kings as conveyed by the "crown" in Shakespeare's history plays culminates in the final play of the second historical tetralogy, *Henry V*, where "crown" undergoes significant semantic evolution. The play deals with Henry IV's son's tactics before, during and after battle, where Henry's victory despite English forces being outnumbered by thousands seemingly transforms "his position as the son of a usurper and his own insecure title" (Curry 253). Such discrepancy between Henry's apparent transformation and status as the son of a usurper that are hinted at in the play would have given spectators clues as to how Henry was a commodified actor playing the part of a sovereign rather than the monarch embodying the role of a soldier-king. Added to the contemporaneous transition from the landed wealth of the aristocracy to the moneyed wealth of the bourgeoisie that spectators were experiencing, the crown in *Henry V* is no longer even a synecdoche of supremacy but becomes a simple form of purchasing power, like the entrance fee paid to see a play.

## **8.2 A definition of "vulgar" surrounding Shakespeare's stage**

Admittedly, as the plays were first performed on stages situated in the unrefined London area of Southwark and surrounded by brothels, bear baiting or cock-fighting arenas, they obviously required some "vulgar" elements to suit the wide-ranging audience of all ages and all social classes they were catering for. Alfred Harbage estimates that the theatres would have been within walking distance of about 160,000 people by 1605 (54) and notes that, for instance, in 1583, Paris Garden, a baiting venue, collapsed when a thousand people were watching a bear baiting one Sunday (84). Given that early modern theatres such as Shakespeare's Globe held up to three thousand spectators at one time (Gurr and Ichikawa "Shakespeare's Theatres" 3) Shakespeare's plays also needed clear symbols so that everyone in the huge audience could

understand what was happening in the plays, easily indicate who characters were, convey ideas or build up theatrical effect for spectators.

“Vulgar” is thus an essential part of all-inclusive representation, especially because, at the time, the term basically meant “common” (OED “vulgar”). There are twenty-five instances of “vulgar” in Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets. While, as with the instances of “commodity”, it would be foolish to make too much of a single term, a sample of the term’s occurrences gives an idea of its usages and complex range of meanings and its moral or societal senses in his works. “Vulgar” may generally refer to the “customary” or the “ordinary” or something that is “of common use”. The term may also mean “not distinguished” and “belonging to the ordinary or common class”. In Shakespeare, “vulgar”, when used as an adjective, is often used to convey colourful mental images that conjure up both the world on stage: such as the common people in *2 Henry IV*, “vulgar heart” (1.3.90); or material objects in *Hamlet*, “vulgar thing” (1.2.99), as in the “most obvious and ordinary thing we perceive with our senses” (Greenblatt “Norton Shakespeare” 1703); or tangible images that transcend the world of the play to include the audience, for instance “the vulgar air” (2.1.387) in *King John*. The adjective “vulgar” indicates to the audience how the characters think, gives them clues as to how they should perceive the world staged before their eyes and replaces theatrical effects that would otherwise be difficult to produce visually.

However, “vulgar” can indicate change: changes in character for instance. Moreover, apart from the history plays, there are other instances where “vulgar” is applied to royalty. “Vulgar” is used to conjure up the image of adultery when Leontes uses the noun “vulgars” in his false accusations of his wife Hermione’s unfaithfulness in *The Winter’s Tale*. He calls her “an adulteress [...] a bed-swarver, even bad as those / That vulgars give bold’st titles (2.1.90-96). As we saw in Chapter Three, in Leontes’ sense, the irreproachable Hermione is nonetheless denoted as a whore; she is as bad as that which “common people call by the coarsest names” (Howard “Norton Shakespeare” 2907). In this way, the queen’s association with those far below her on the social scale brings her down to their base level. As we also saw, however, Hermione resists Leontes’ efforts to debase her by claiming that “life can be no commodity” (3.2.91), thus refusing to be objectified as a commodity (interchangeable with a commoner/commodified object). Shakespeare, because he chooses to use the words “vulgar” or “commodity”, changes the audience’s perspective. The dignity and legitimacy associated with royalty are inverted; the noteworthy choice of words “vulgar” and “commodity” conveys the opposite of the decorum and carefully controlled ritual of authority, or the opposite, in this instance.

In the history plays, Shakespeare provides an even more tangible and spectacular depiction of the possibility for role reversal. The playwright's use of the "crown", a word or prop traditionally held to perform power since it is taken to represent the rightful ruler, is transformed into a vulgar commodity thanks to stage business that also provides the possibility for audiences to perceive the king differently. Words especially open up the opportunity for this critical distance, which is why it is important to discover the strong transformative power of the term "crown" through its etymological and numismatic meanings.

### **8.3 The etymology of "crown" and its numismatic meanings**

The term "crown" in its approximately thirty various instances is used in *Henry V* on an almost equal par with the other history plays, including *Richard III*, *Richard II* and both the first and second parts of *Henry IV*. If the number is far less than the one hundred and twenty-three instances of the word in the three parts of *Henry VI* (evidence of the turbulent interchangeability of the crown in this group of plays), in no other play does the term undergo such significant evolution as in *Henry V*. I now will outline the graphic and linguistic evolution of crown before investigating the numismatic significance of the word in early modern England.

The "crown" was originally a device designed to make a vivid dramatic statement and a highly-accessible visual symbol conferring power on its wearer. Yet, the word's original twelfth century sense ("circular ornamental headdress" or the now obsolete "tonsure" of the representatives of the Church) underwent a semantic shift in the next century to convey a more democratic sense of the upper part of the head, or simply the "vertex of the skull", in other words, a mere biological point of reference. This bodily designation meant that the word could now serve to form an association between head and summit of the body over the next three centuries. At the same time, the coin bearing the same name and "bearing on the obverse a large crown" (OED "crown" etymology) simultaneously appeared so that interpretations came, quite naturally, to function metonymically in relation to all previous meanings. As a link between man and money had been established by the sixteenth century, the ideas of the use of royal prerogative, coinage and counterfeit could be exploited by Shakespeare to the dramatic full. Moreover, Barrie Cook remarks that the most common gold coin mentioned in the history plays that deal with the Hundred Years' War and the ensuing English civil war commonly known as the "Wars of the Roses" was, anachronistically, the "crown": the coin of 5-shillings that had only been introduced in 1526 and was the standard gold currency of Shakespeare's own day, if by then minted with debased 22 carat "crown gold" (40).



The debasing of coinage for immediate profit by Henry VIII and Edward VI had led to the nine Marian and the fifteen Elizabethan proclamations establishing the rates at which coins were to be valued as well as forbidding exporting, melting or abusing the coins and warning the population to be wary of counterfeit coins or those similar in appearance to monies of greater value (Youngs Jr. 104). Elizabeth I's royal proclamation of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1560 (Hughes and Larkin no. 471), calling in the old coins and replacing them with a reformed issue, had also allowed her to net a profit; she collected coins made of precious metal to melt down and then produced a higher number of coins with less intrinsic value as "coins were set below the actual worth of their precious metal [so that] the government could pay for the reminting and still make a gain" (Youngs Jr. 105). In Shakespeare, Henry V's rise to power seems contrived by a similar process of profitable opportunism despite his lesser worth.

Audiences would have been aware, either from Holinshed's *The Third Volume of Chronicles*, upon which the plays were based, or through Shakespeare's two previous *Henry IV* plays, that Henry V was the son of Henry IV, who usurped Richard II's throne, metaphorically melting down the precious value of the crown as he did so. During Richard's abdication scene (*Richard II* 4.1), the crown or the sceptre, another significant stage prop representing royalty, is put aside (4.1.195) to stress the end of legitimate order. Moreover, the mirror Richard asks for, to contemplate the dissolution of his two indivisible private and public kingly bodies (according to the theory of the divine right of kings), is smashed into pieces as if to signify the shattering of ethically pure medieval ideas of kingship and its replacement by an increasingly discourteous Machiavellian concept of command (4.1.279). The future Henry V can thus be seen, like his father, as in a "theatre [as a] well-graced actor" (*Richard II* 5.2.23-24), with less intrinsic worth than the rightful king's heir would legitimately have had.

Shakespeare thus manipulates Prince Hal as a character, through words and events, to influence audience reception of him as replacement "issue" clearly lacking in intrinsic value: in *1 Henry IV*, despite Hal giving the audience the information that he is of kingly worth and only acting at behaving vulgarly (1.2.179-195). He nonetheless engages in the highway robbery of the king's exchequer (2.1), before swindling his drinking companion, Falstaff, out of his part of the theft (2.3.11). Afterwards, in the Boar's Head tavern, both take turns to act Hal and Henry IV (2.5.340-439) in preparation for the prince's audience with his father, which is another occasion for Shakespeare to show the character's talents for manipulation, whilst reminding audiences of how Henry's father changed places with Richard II. Hal promises Henry IV that he will kill Hotspur (3.2.129-159) in revenge for the Percy rebellion, he pays back the money stolen (3.3.163-164) and redeems himself completely for his uncouth carousing by saving his



father's life from the Scotsman Douglas in the Shrewsbury battle with the rebels (5.4.38-45). He nonetheless allows Falstaff to take credit for Hal's killing of Hotspur (5.4.150-151), thus denying the ritualistic justice of medieval chivalric order and suggesting that Hal's "vulgar" traits run deeper than the character would care to admit.

Shakespeare spectacularly shows Hal trying on his father's crown because he believes the sick king has died (4.3.173) and, since he is the eldest son, he is now monarch. Thus, the character takes advantage of the rules of primogeniture, and Shakespeare makes the most of the significant stage prop of the crown to show that understanding should go beyond the symbol to suggest the true nature of the prince through his handling of it. Hal's snatching of the crown reenacts his father's discourteous seizing of Richard's royal regalia, thus suggesting that the future king is ethically inadequate. As we have seen in previous chapters, audiences knew that regal power had become commodified; after all, they were aware of monarchs' reliance upon debt and their Merchants Adventurers despite domestic spoliation of the monasteries and the commoners. Seeing Shakespeare's authoritative figures are often depicted as such this would have confirmed what audiences probably suspected anyway, especially as this form of objectification had already emerged in texts such as Machiavelli's already analysed.

#### **8.4 The commodity of the crown**

In *Henry V*, the "crown" as an intermediary also provides multiple perspectives on kingship: medieval and modern, local and global. Even before the play begins, the audience hears the advice given to Hal by his dying father: "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of former days" (2 *Henry IV* 4.3.341-343); and indeed, Thomas Smith notes how it is better to busy quarrelsome heads and hands accustomed to fight abroad than at home ("Commonwealth" 219). Accordingly, Henry V invades France to engage otherwise rebellious domestic factions in common pursuit of the French crown: . However, just like Vincentio's dubious legitimacy in *Measure for Measure*, the authority upon which Henry V had crowned himself "king of France" upon his ascension to the English throne on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1413 was just as fragile as his usurping father's. Audiences may have known how Richard II's reign was sullied by the king's unpopular court favourites and ended in a quarrel between his "Appellants", Mowbray and Bolingbroke (the future Henry IV), who had been employed to keep the peace between parliamentary and royalist factions. Bolingbroke inherited Richard's throne after the latter abdicated in his favour in 1399, following an armed conflict over land that should have gone to Bolingbroke but that was

confiscated by the crown after the death of Richard's uncle, John of Gaunt, in February of the same year.

Admittedly, William the Conqueror's legacy had been passed on to future generations so that Henry V's great-grandfather, Edward III, felt sufficiently justified to begin the Hundred Years' War by arguing that he was heir, albeit through the female line, to the late French king Charles IV. Furthermore, after Edward's death in 1377, the crown was handed down to his grandson, Richard II, who attempted to reinforce the title by marrying the then king Charles VI's not yet seven-year-old daughter, Isabella in 1396 (Curry 17-18). However, after Henry Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard, the certainties of English inheritance became questionable to a degree that it was no longer clear who was the rightful wearer of the crown on either side of the Channel. As Anne Curry points out, "Joan of Navarre [mother to John of Brittany] had married Henry IV in 1403 as part of the king's policy to find friends in Europe against France and to formalize international acceptance of his usurpation" (25). The problem, as we have seen, was that Henry was not the legitimate ruler. As George W. Keeton notes:

If a ruler was a usurper he could never conform to this orthodox pattern; he therefore could not be expected to show loftier values. Such a ruler can only show what Machiavelli called *virtu*, which has nothing of Christian goodness in it. Its most striking components are courage, energy, and a capacity for quick and decisive action, but for evil as well as good. [...] It is described by Henry IV as his rule of action, but its exercise may involve injustice and civil strife [...]. On the other hand, a lawfully appointed king may not discharge his office adequately, Richard II repeatedly violates his trust as a ruler. Nevertheless he is still the anointed king (264-265).

Tillyard observes how Shakespeare's problem, concerning *King John*, is "how to legitimise the illegitimate" ("History Plays" 227). The issue is comparable in *Henry V*. When Shakespeare created the play, he knew that his Elizabethan audience would probably be aware of such past disorder from Holinshed's chronicles or John Stow's *The Chronicles of England*. His audience could have also been aware of *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, a play dated 1598, although it may have been performed earlier. Perhaps more importantly, spectators could have linked up past conflict to present upheaval, notably pertaining to the complexity of Tudor leadership. Elizabeth I had no heirs and Henry VIII's First Succession Act (1534) [25. Henry VIII cap. 22; *Stat. Realm* iii, 471-4] and Second Succession Act (1536) [28. Henry VIII cap. 7; *Stat. realm* iii, 655-62] had initially made her illegitimate (Levine 151, 155). Moreover, there

were continuing conflicts with Spain and insubordination on the part of the Earl of Essex, who had been sent to Ireland in March of the year the play was first performed to subdue the revolt led by the second Earl of Tyrone (Hugh O'Neill), but who had concluded a truce with the rebels in September against the Queen's orders and immediately returned to London without permission. John Guy explains how the two conflicts were to merge and escalate by the end of the century: "The war with Spain had finally spread to Ireland" with Philip II landing 3,400 "crack troops and a battery of siege-guns at Kinsale in September 1601" (366). Domestic and foreign conflicts thus continued to threaten crown stability.

To contain contention in such tenuous contexts Elizabeth I often resorted to metaphor, like, as we have seen, in her 1588 Tilbury speech where she gives a concrete representation of herself (thanks to the vivid images of her "heart" and "stomach") of a "king". The stylistic device is defined by George Puttenham as "the figure of transport" that enlarges upon the meaning of a term so as to encapsulate another; it is "a kind of wresting of a single word from his own right signification, to another not so natural, but yet of some affinity or convenience with it" (228). Likewise, in *Henry V*, Shakespeare wrestles with clearly identifiable imagery in the "crown" so that the word brokers new meaning; from a symbolic game of bowls in *King John*, audiences could just as easily understand how expedient mercantilism had overtaken early modern society. Similarly, a multitude of significances arise from and expand upon the term "crown".

### **8.5 An outward show of value to obscure an inner lack of worth**

A division, at once linguistic and functional, thus seems at the heart of Shakespeare's depiction of Henry V's philosophy of rule. The king should be thinking of his country rather than himself but, as the expedient self takes precedence, a differing signification is given to the "crown" as a symbol of the "commodity" that seems fundamental to the meaning of the play. Indeed, what spectators are shown is a re-minted version of kingship along with an increasingly contrived image of the royal insignia in replacement of the traditional conception of legitimacy and rightfulness that was formerly personified by the "crown". Ernst Kantorowicz comments:

The Crown, as the embodiment of all sovereign rights – within the realm and without – of the whole body politic, was superior to all its individual members, including the king, though not separated from them. In many respects the Crown would coincide with the king as the head of the body politic, and it certainly coincided with him dynastically, since the Crown descended on the king by right hereditary. At the same time however,

the Crown appeared also as a composite body, an aggregate of the king and those responsible for maintaining the inalienable rights of the Crown and the kingdom (381).

Shakespeare shows how Henry is performed as a devalued, fabricated emblem of the “crown”, rather than the rightful ruler with the crown as a symbol of inner worth. Furthermore, forms of objectification are not only performed by the character himself but also by those “responsible for maintaining the inalienable rights of Crown and kingdom”.

For instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury argues that Henry “Make claim and title to the crown of France” (1.2.68), because his great-great grandmother, Isabella, who married Edward II in 1308, and was the mother of Edward III, was the daughter of the French king Philip IV. The Archbishop repeats “crown of France” in a speech charged with lexical anaphora used to emphasise both past entitlements and present annexation: “Wearing the crown of France, till satisfied / That fair Queen Isabel, his grandmother, / Was lineal of the Lady Ermengarde, / Daughter to Charles, the foresaid duke of Lorraine; / By the which marriage, the line of Charles the Great / Was re-united to the crown of France” (1.2.80-85). The repetition of the term “crown of France” here lends itself to a rhetorical manipulation whose *raison d'être* seems above all to be the obsessional nature of the desired object (the “crown”) that not only unifies the speech thematically but performs a long heritage of unfair dealings in a specifically English analysis of the logic of divine right. Representation also perhaps ridicules the clergy's authority, epitomised by what would have undoubtedly been an actor sporting the tonsure of church representatives, but that would also have brought to mind the balding crowns of the head as a result of “French crown”: syphilis (Green “French crown”). “French crown” might “refer to French coins, kings, kingdoms, or the bald heads that were symptomatic of the venereal diseases blamed on the French” (Howard “Norton Shakespeare” 296). The Archbishop's “crown of France”, because it could be associated with the vulgar both on semantic, visual and material levels, would have thus discredited, rather than demonstrated, Henry's claim to legitimacy as ruling monarch. The satirical re-evaluation of “crown” would have focussed attention on the inferior and can thus be seen as detrimental to the king's status in this instance.

The poetic fertility of “French crown” is also achieved when the laity lay down Henry's obligation to enforce the monarch's right to reclaim access to ancestral properties, just as his father had done in England after Richard II had confiscated lands that should have gone to Bolingbroke in the wake of his uncle John of Gaunt's death. Shakespeare's character Exeter uses the term in the episode intended to construct spiritual and secular harmony in the court of the French King Charles:

EXETER        He wills you, in the name of God Almighty,  
                   That you divest yourself, and lay apart  
                   The borrowed glories that by gift of heaven,  
                   By law of nature and of nations, 'longs  
                   To him and to his heirs; namely, the crown  
                   And all wide-stretchèd honours that pertain  
                   By custom and the ordinance of times  
                   Unto the crown of France (*Henry V* 2.4.77-84).

However, Exeter's subsequent use of "crown" is in fact a threat to the French throne and uncannily antedates Henry's own distressing address to the governor of Harfleur (3.3.110-120), where the king promises rape, impalement and death to the town's inhabitants if they refuse to surrender:

EXETER        Bloody constraint. For if you hide the crown  
                   Even in your hearts, there will he rake for it, [...]  
                   Deliver up the crown, and to take mercy  
                   On the poor souls for whom this hungry war  
                   Opens his vasty jaws; and on your head  
                   Turning the widows' tears, the orphans' cries  
                   The dead men's blood, the pining maidens groans,  
                   For husbands, fathers and betrothèd lovers,  
                   That shall be swallowed in this controversy (*Henry V* 2.4.97-109).

The "crown" in Exeter's speech metaphorically anticipates the literal violence that the English troops endure even outside of battle, including looting (3.6 and 4.4) and the killing of the English pages: "Kill the boys and the luggage! 'Tis expressly against the law of arms. 'Tis as arrant a piece of knavery, mark you now, as can be offert. In your conscience, now, is it not?" (4.7.1-4) and then "every soldier kill his prisoners" (4.6.37). In *Henry V*, both spiritual and secular establishment figures thus undermine crown authority, either because they can be made the butt of vulgar jokes or because their language anticipates chaotic expediency instead of executing performative signs of royal integrity. Since Henry relies on these two symbolic

figures to uphold his own legitimacy, the “crown” is mocked; both Church and State use words that produce effects for audiences that are contrary to official intentions.

Theatre thus reveals how the appropriation of the “French crown” is clearly inadequate in its objectives. In fact, the monarchical emblem was often a symbol of anxiety during the Renaissance, according to the proverb, “crowns have cares” (Wilson 157). In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke first articulates the tensions and frustrations associated with it: “Part of your cares you give me with your crown” (4.1.184); in 2 *Henry IV*, the usurper expresses the unease connected with the wrongful seizure of the highest insignia: “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown” (3.1.31). A pause appears in *Henry V*: Henry reminds spectators of his repayment of his father’s fault in “compassing the crown” (4.1.276) by Richard II’s state funeral, the building of two chapels where masses were sung for the dead king’s soul (4.1.283), and the crowns spent in the pay of five hundred poor for saying a twice-daily penitence and seeking of pardon (4.1.280). In the build up to the battle of Agincourt, however, it becomes increasingly clear that the crown is not so much an entitlement as an uncertain investment. As such, the “crown” suggests the discrepancy between person and function, objectifying the ruler as a commodity, instead of reinforcing the notion of ethical authenticity as defined by the theory of the divine right of kings. The embedded effect is further reinforced during the battle itself, when the audience is presented with a “crown” that signifies a mere coin and that is multiplied as a means to see through Henry’s outwardly glittering performance of honourable kingship into a dramatic expression of his multiple expedient selves.

### **8.6 Stage gloves filled with crowns**

Undeniably, “crowns” participate in traditional attempts at national unity. When Henry declares, just before battle: “That he which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart. His passport shall be made / And crowns for convoy put into his purse. / We would not die in that man’s company / That fears his fellowship to die with us” (4.3.35-39), Shakespeare shows how the king is at once confirming royal authority, forcing “men of all ranks to demonstrate their loyalty in a practical manner” (Curry 64) and keeping hopes alive for all levels of society to become part of the “happy few”, the “band of brothers” (4.3.60) after the English victory. Nonetheless, Shakespeare provides evidence of the flaws of the now financial, rather than feudal, system. Overall confusion becomes a particularly strong feature of the play when an unnamed, thus generic, French soldier, is taken prisoner and a ransom demanded: “Peasant, unless thou give me crowns, brave crowns; / [...] mangled shalt thou be by this my sword. [...] Tell him my fury shall abate, and I the crowns will take” (4.4.34-43). Since the term “crowns”

is related at once to the king and the peasant, this raises audience awareness of the debasement of royal status while acknowledging the ubiquity of monetary representation of commodity (for the common soldier or the soldier-king, suggested in Chapter Seven) as an expression of identity.

The process continues and intensifies when the King is confronted directly with English subordinates before and after battle; Shakespeare makes use of the potential depth of meaning that belongs both to the lexical field and the new social transactions denoted by the “crown” in the scenes involving the indentured soldiers Court, Bate and Williams (4.1). The king is disguised (a trope he shares with Vincentio) as a common soldier in an attempt to gauge the morale of the troops on the eve of the encounter (4.1.128-139). The heavily cloaked monarch nonetheless finds the time to pick a fight with Williams by exchanging gloves with his subordinate as proof of the valour and virtues of the king, and, by extension the “crown” (he plans to resume the discussion after the battle). However, if Henry carries off what Anne Curry designates an “amazing victory” for the English albeit an “unmitigated disaster for the French as well as a blood bath” (12) at Agincourt, Williams does not think that Henry’s practical joke of placing the soldier’s glove in Captain Fluellen’s hat (so that they both pick another fight after all the previous slaughter) is particularly funny.

This is all the more so as Henry orders that William’s glove be filled with “crowns”, that is, ordinary coins, to alleviate tension: “Here, Uncle Exeter, fill this glove with crowns / And give it to this fellow. – Keep it, fellow, / And wear it for an honour in thy cap / Till I do challenge it. – Give him the crowns” (4.8.52-55). Henry uncannily echoes Richard II’s words to the king’s father, Bolingbroke, during Richard’s illegitimate removal from office: “Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown” (*Richard II* 4.1.173), which, by double association, especially depreciates the gesture. Shakespeare has Henry further decrease the value of the symbol “crown” by its numerical dispersion, so that the meaning of “crown”, becomes semantically weaker to a point where royal insignia becomes nothing more than a vulgar means of exchange (“crowns”). Here, Shakespeare exposes how Henry clearly misapprehends meanings of worth (a king’s natural qualities) and value (a monarch’s price). Henry’s rhetorical intention is that the synecdoche of expanded power, “crown” should be multiplied into “crowns” and the emblem spread throughout the newly extended kingdom to reinforce the royal presence and rally its new citizens to his cause.

His words are, however, the means Shakespeare uses to echo the visual effects of the shattered mirror in *Richard II*. Whereas Shakespeare presents spectators with an interiorised and contemplative perspective as regards the usurped Richard and the end of medieval concepts



of kingship, Henry's spent "crowns" draw attention to the usurper's son's spectacular lack of profundity and stress the unscrupulous nature of the new form of rule. Moreover, spectators could have understood a bawdy illusion, as "glove" signified "vagina" in Shakespeare's England (Green "glove") suggesting payment for moneyed services of all sorts. This is a way for the playwright to remind his public both of the go-between function of "commodity" as exposed by Faulconbridge in *King John* and Henry's sense of an inner self as objectified despite his shining outer appearance. Shakespeare clearly exposes the commodification of the monarch, who, as we saw in Chapter Four, has experienced a close linguistic and physical proximity to Falstaff and the prostitutes in the Stews and has a self-professed propensity for the acting profession (an early modern commonplace for objectification).

Inversely, the soldier surpasses the sovereign in this scene, but it is uncertain whether Williams accepts the money (Maus "Norton Shakespeare" 1536). He says: "I will none of your money" (4.8.62) and also refuses Fluellen's "twelve pence" (4.8.58), approximately a day's wages, to mend his shoes (4.8.64) in the absence of Henry finding an amicable solution to the spat. The particular stress on a pair of shoes and the instruction to mend them implies that Henry assumes he exercises a continued control over the soldier after Agincourt; object and body trope each other mutually through the concept of a soldier as a pair of shoes. Similarly, Henry's desire to purchase Williams' body is made plain through association with the glove that performs prostitution but should really symbolise the ritualistic codes of medieval combat. Significantly, the monarch's language is shown as ineffective for he cannot manage to have Williams accept his bribe. Indeed, as Thomas Smith warns: "But if the Prince will deceive them, and give them copper for silver or gold [...] he is deceived by his subjects" ("Commonwealth" 95), in the sense of the king using his subjects falsely and him being mistaken about them (OED "deceive"). As such, the perspective is inverted: Henry is not an authoritative king wearing his crown. The royal body is instead represented as debased coinage so that spectators can see the embedded meaning at the core of the play: an actor dressed up as a king. The commonly understood images of disguise and deception, of the glove filled with money, stress the demise of legitimate ritualistic order and a nascent spurious ethos performed by Henry's ideology of self-fashioning handed down to him by Henry IV. Shakespeare's *Henry V* hence shows how the king reduces rather than increases his value as a commander, whether this be a question of the crown, the symbol of the royal might, or that of a modest minted currency.

Henry himself claims that he is prepared to diminish the scope of existing laws by "clipping" (committing the crime, punishable as treason, of decreasing the value of a coin whilst continuing to circulate it at face value), just before hostilities begin: "the French may lay twenty

French crowns to one, they will beat us; for they bear them on their shoulders: but it is no English treason to cut French crowns, and to-morrow the king himself will be a clipper” (4.1.208-211). More than providing a vivid metaphor of his “potency and the [...] emasculation he will deal the French” (Rubinstein 50), Henry’s language may point to how play-acting could offer a new perception of kingship as corrupted performance. Shakespeare offers metacritical distance to put Elizabeth I’s “crown” practices (calling in valuable coins and reissuing them with more vulgar content for her own gain) into perspective.

### 8.7 Acting kings

Henry adopts the attitude of power but can now only wield power within a cash nexus paradigm since the crown has acquired new significance. As such, the medieval theory of the king’s two indivisible bodies progressively yields to an increasingly modern version of the dissemination of the “crown” in a process where appearance takes priority over essence and the regent merely enacts empty rhetoric. The desecration of the “crown” results in a consecration of the commodified and an objectified monarch, who becomes even less than an actor paid to play the part of a king and who can remove his disguise after the show. This is a fact that Shakespeare had already voiced through the character of Henry VI, in *3 Henry VI*, who comments on the commodification of kingship: “Once more we sit in England’s royal throne, / Re-purchased with the blood of enemies” (5.7.1-2).

The point is made again in *Henry V* with the embedding of romantic-comedy scenes involving Henry’s wooing of Katherine that reverberate on how principles of unity and solidarity are henceforth beholden to mercantilist philosophies. To the defeated French, he utters a speech full of terms invoking commerce (“growth”, “buy”, “demand”): “If, Duke of Burgundy, you would the peace / Whose want gives growth to th’imperfections / Which you have cited, you must buy that peace / With full accord to our just demands” (5.2.68-71). Likewise, his future wife, Katherine, the daughter of the French king, and, by extension, the “crown of France”, is Henry’s “capital demand” (5.2.96). As such, the variable significance of the term “capital” (principal, investment), like the polysemous word “crown”, adds to the ambiguity of the collectively bargained peace process because it is related to the notions of risk and return. The marriage proposal of the final scene can be interpreted as a cathartic comical ending to relieve the tension of the war but it may also be Shakespeare’s intent to show a deprivation of liberty comparable to the prisoners taken on the battlefield, rather than a declaration of love, which further puts the reliability of the king’s worth into question.

In fact, Katherine would seem to have little choice in the matter of her marriage and is essentially represented as the spoils of war. Rather than this meaning that her character acts as a foil to glorify the king, her representation as a vulgar commodity means that his denial of her freedom of choice rather dishonors kingly status. As Katherine Eisaman Maus has it: “[E]ven if [Katherine] refuses to play Henry’s game, she necessarily plays it anyhow [...] Shakespeare fascinates us by exhibiting the inevitably equivocal nature of kingly glory” (Maus “Norton Shakespeare” 1478). As such, Shakespeare gives his spectators the opportunity to form their own opinions of Henry’s performance of kingship: either as the providential soldier-king or the regent-as-object in a succession of pageants over which the character ultimately seems to have no control; Shakespeare’s drama gives substance to a context where the “crown”, if it keeps its name, can only keep up appearances of kingship.

To the end, the playwright clearly encourages ambivalent responses to Henry’s oxymoronic “holy battle” for the crown of France – the king’s massacre, in the name of ““God for Harry! England, and Saint George!”” (3.1.34) of “ten thousand French / That in the field lie slain” (4.8.74-75). Peace at home is clearly only achieved at the expense of heavy losses abroad. It may have seemed that there was no other viable system of value. It was even diminished for France’s rival factions, who, although they had ostensibly been reconciled by the Peace of Auxerre, of 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1412, had only managed to unite against the “common invader” in the very last minutes before battle (Curry 40, Jones 95). England, as France, was hereafter moving towards what Lars Engle calls the “grim pragmatism” (117) of the dynastic process where former certainties had to be measured in an ambiguous context. Sandra K. Fischer adds that battles such as Agincourt may thus “be viewed metaphorically as a contractual economic venture, where soldiers are commodities, the king is counterfeited and ‘payment’ is death” (136). Such a financial image, as David Hawkes notes, “provides an appropriate vehicle by which Shakespeare reflects on human hypocrisy [especially as] ‘Hypocrite’ is Greek for ‘actor’” (“Theory” 173) and theatre was well-placed to expose early modern social mobility such as the commodity idolatry and objectification represented in *Henry V*.

## 8.8 Conclusion

The crown as a vulgar stage property, by seeming to accord agency and command to the characters who merely hold or wear it, undermines any assertion of stable off-stage greatness; kings seem therefore only to be a travesty of genuine command (Orgel “Greatness” 45). While kings attempt to enforce authority through the object of the crown, the crown reveals how they forfeit their own agency because of its treatment as an exchange good. As such, words and

objects become concrete cross-cultural theatrical and extra-theatrical signifiers available to all. On one hand, the terms “commodity” and “crown” can refer to the legitimate or convey valuations of worthwhile and practical identification. Inversely, when the same words mean profit or self-interest they represent, though allusion and association, the very traits that they are designed to challenge. Thus, “French crown” can mean an authentic claim to state authority or a simple venereal disease, and can be associated with commerce.

Moreover, by vulgarising monarchy, Shakespeare ennobles the masses and accords greater recognition to the common man than royalty would ostensibly give him credit for. Through a final allusion to the “vulgar” and its direct association with substitution of status in the bloody aftermath of Agincourt, Montjoy provides an extremely tangible challenge to any aristocratic legitimacy of control:

MONTJOY      I come to thee for charitable licence,  
                    That we may wander o’er this bloody field  
                    To book our dead and then to bury them;  
                    To sort our nobles from our common men –  
                    For many of our princes, woe the while,  
                    Lie drowned and soaked in mercenary blood.  
                    So do our vulgar soak their peasant limbs  
                    In blood of princes, and our wounded steeds  
                    Fret fetlock-deep in gore, and with wild rage  
                    Jerk out their armed heels at their dead masters,  
                    Killing them twice (*Henry V* 4.7.63-73).

What the audience may possibly also have known, from chronicles such as those of the Abbot of Saint-Denis, was the division amongst the French factions, the change of the battle location from Aubigny to Agincourt and the arrival of Gallic troops in dribs and drabs from all over France, which weakened their efficiency. This information could be added to the knowledge of the continuous volleys of English arrows that caused numerous deaths amongst the unprepared French men-at-arms or cavalry that were boosted by Henry’s order to kill the large number of French prisoners, who both sides believed would be ransomed but whom were murdered because Henry believed he had already won and wanted to push the French to withdraw (Curry 255-257). In fact, the French herald’s concern for the whereabouts of his countrymen clearly weaves together the familiar separation of status of the “nobles” and the “common men” whilst

underlining the shared “blood” of the vulgar wage labouring “peasants” and the aristocratic lineage of “princes”.

The exchange of “blood” resists the separation of the military inferiors from their commanding officers and deprives the latter of agency, even to the extent their surviving steeds spur them twice to death in the gore-filled battlefield. If a French herald speaks these lines, this was without doubt to avoid censorship from London authorities. Yet, as we have seen, “mercenary blood” meant opportunist kings in Shakespeare, even on the English side of the Channel. This was especially true if we remember that “blood” in Shakespeare’s time, in the sense of “the seat of the emotions”, signifies the “aristocratic rowdy” (Green “blood”) that was a personality trait of Prince Hal. Consequently, we are ultimately uncertain as to whose “blood” Montjoy is truly referring to. With this final emphasis on the vulgar Shakespeare invites spectators to keep a critical distance in relation to performances of command, commonplace or commodities such as the crown, which aurally or visually broker power but are ultimately only stage commodities.

## • CHAPTER NINE: GENERAL CONCLUSION

This thesis explores what Shakespeare's representation of commodity shows us about early modern society, how these representations relate to wider significations of value and why we should consider the question on a societal rather than an individual level. I have demonstrated that commodity was an increasingly pervasive feature of early modern England and had come to influence its institutions to an extent that society was unable to provide an alternative to counter the crisis of value it was undergoing in the aftermath of feudalism. Moreover, "commodity", a term widely identified with women, also affected men. Indeed, a gender-indiscriminate loss of agency has been shown to affect Shakespeare's characters across the early modern social scale. Beginning with an analysis of the lexical evolution of "commodity", the thesis has largely been devoted to study of Elizabethan and Jacobean texts and contexts examined alongside theatrical performance. I have studied the evolution of the term "commodity" from a multi-faceted perspective, in particular to avoid a reductive dialectical approach contrasting male and female, given that the term has perhaps too easily been applied only to women. Cultural and literary scholarship, when studied with early modern source texts, has been an invaluable methodological tool to facilitate interpretation of the many ambivalent forms of commodity. This investigation of the occurrences of the term in Shakespeare's works provides valuable information on burgeoning early modern systems of worth. Especially when viewed in the context of early modern mercantilist debates, Shakespeare's representations give us a "sense of how ubiquitous the preoccupation with 'commodity' was in early modern English social and cultural life" (Drakakis Personal communication).

In the Introduction, I traced the multiple meanings of "commodity" in early modern England. It cannot be doubted that the public would have understood the multiple meanings and cumulative effects that make it possible to attract attention to the many significations of the term "commodity" used. The multiple meanings, which result from the overlapping of various sources of legitimacy, give access to nuanced perceptions because language is embedded in a changing society. Thus, even the use of simple words points to a complexity of interpretation and provokes a very wide range of responses. In this thesis, I have attempted to analyse whether the early modern terms could signify loss or gain of agency and have suggested that members of all groups of society were in some way "commodified". For a sixteenth and seventeenth century speaker of English, "commodity" was dissimilar from and yet correlated to our modern notions of objectification, which are today dependent on Marxist, gender, cultural, economic or political alignments and interpretations. In the early modern period, the word commodity had come to take on different meanings due to societal change over the transition from feudalism

to nascent capitalism. In Chapter Two, we see how mentalities were changing: the mercantilist entrepreneurial spirit favoured an individualism incompatible with the fixed vision of an immutable universe where the whole counted infinitely more than its components.

Significantly, as observed in Chapter Three, five of Shakespeare's plays deal with this semantic and societal shift. They all include variants of the term and reveal the disintegration of old generation commodiousness in favour of new generation commodity. Moreover, the sense of agency that can be understood in these new significations affects both the individual and the state. By representing the now obsolete and emerging meanings in plays dealing with old and new generations, Shakespeare depicts a watershed moment when a cultural framework organised by social relations was being replaced by a more chaotic framework structured around money. As Knights points out, "economic problems were accentuated by the glaring contrast between the fortunes that were amassed in, say, the East India trade [...] on the one hand, and the destitution and economic uncertainty of many thousands on the other" (Knights 174). The new paradigm admittedly opens up possibilities for empowerment but also allows for a manipulation of power that further disorganises social classification and hierarchy. We can say that if the old order had its faults, the new one is hardly represented as an improvement upon it. For instance, Lear's authority lost its legitimacy through his gift of commodity (the property of his person as a king and the things belonging to him as a regent and a father); traditional authoritarian ties were broken and his credibility as the intermediary for higher powers was lost. Because those gaining power through commodity use force and violence, seduction and coercion, however, their authority is inevitably chaotic. Chaos due to confusions in the meaning of commodity are also apparent even when imminent death is not an issue. As I have shown, Leontes' intellectual dishonesty in *The Winter's Tale* almost leads to tragedy for the whole country and is only nuanced by Autolycus' parody of the king's commodity idolatry. Leontes' literal violence towards his family is counterbalanced by the vagrant's metaphorical attack: "Oh, the loathsomeness of them offended the stripes I have received, which are mighty ones and millions [...] I am robbed, sir, and beaten; my money and apparel taken from me, and these detestable things put upon me" (4.3.52-58).

The two men pretend to be victims of a commodity conspiracy. If Autolycus manages to make us smile, Shakespeare's representation of how Leontes is unable at first to cope with the changes also encourages us to think. Raphael Lyne notes the effectiveness of this dramaturgical process of several levels of meaning reflecting different facets of early modern reality when he comments: "[Shakespeare] foster[s] irony and multiple layers to contemplate, rather than providing single-layered wonders to amaze" (137). Thus, when Autolycus sings all



his range of products for sale, to seduce his candidly rustic clientele, he also promises a sense of immediate well-being that highlights the failings, rather than the successes, of nascent consumerism:

AUTOLYCUS   Lawn as white as driven snow,  
                  Cypress black as e'er was crow,  
                  Gloves as sweet as damask roses,  
                  Masks for faces, and for noses; [...]  
                  Pins and poking sticks of steel,  
                  What maids lack from head to heel  
                  Come buy of me, come, come buy, come buy,  
                  Buy, lads or else your lasses cry. Come buy (*The Winter's Tale* 4.4.214-225)!

Here, Shakespeare sarcastically points to the effects of a useless consumer system ("What maids lack from head to heel") that cannot be perceived by those who have been deceived by commodity ("Masks for faces"). As Peter Ackroyd points out, that female characters wore masks was "an overtly theatrical way of disguising their fundamentally male identity" (356), which was also an accurate pointer to how the whole of society was involved in the commodity game. This idea is corroborated by James A. Knapp, who comments: "The openness attributed to the Shakespearian text may well be a defining feature of the aesthetic object [...] but it is not a feature of aesthetic response. Just as Leontes will choose, first wrongly and then justly, so we as spectators are faced with the interpretive dilemmas posed by the consequences of human judgement" (277). When Autolycus sings: "Come to the pedlar, / Money's a meddler [...] That doth utter all men's ware-a" (4.308-310), he is parodying the values at the heart of early modern mercantilism.

Precisely because he is a coney-catcher, Autolycus represents how the new commodity game is all lies and thieving and should be ordered to restore some human characteristics to what was becoming a totally cash-oriented system. The Oracle warned that "the King shall live without an heir if that / which is lost be not found" (3.2.133-134), but it needs the magic of theatre and Shakespeare's artistic management of proceedings to widen the commodity narrative. The fairy tale trope of a sixteen-year slumber transforms the noise of Leontes' jealous ravings into more matter-of-fact music made possible by the parody of things past. Speech and stagecraft create a dramatic reality which plays on the murkiness in both the characters' and

spectators' minds and parody crosses spatial and temporal boundaries to let in new and more clear-sighted "I/eyes". Hence, when the plot returns to Sicily, new commodity standards have been grafted onto traditional ones and if winter turns to spring again, the macrocosm unchanging, the microcosmic court has had its circle enlarged to visualise a different form of commodity. Paulina's adaptation to the new commodity game and her "resurrection" of Hermione more importantly highlights how in *The Winter's Tale*, and the other five plays that I analyse in Chapter Three, commodity has meanings that remain open for multiple interpretations.

We see this through those in the world of Shakespeare's plays who define themselves by reductively classifying others as a subordinate social or gendered category. Accordingly, in Chapter Four, I have explored the performance of the prostitute in Shakespearean theatre and found wider representations of the phenomenon. Through the lens of the brothel, I first analysed early modern whoredom in its socio-historical context and then as a dramatically represented concept. Shakespeare's Nell, Doll or Kate Keepdown are commonly regarded as objectified and yet they also provide the ideology for a wider configuration of commodity. The plays also examine how men in positions of power such as Prince Hal or Lysimachus are also belittled through association with prostitutes or their own commodity idolatry. While, in early modern England, only prostitutes were commonly considered exchange objects, Shakespeare figuratively associates the nobility, soldiers, pimps, clients of prostitution, and indeed even the actors portraying them, with the concept. His works reveal how, by conserving medieval notions of patriarchy, men attempted to conserve agency by subjugating women. Yet prostitutes, who were no longer restrained within the brothel by the time Shakespeare was writing, had begun to infiltrate men's cultural networks. If regarded with unease, prohibited and monitored, prostitutes would no longer be hidden from public attention. The early modern history of the commodity is one hence fraught with tensions and characterised by a disputed dichotomy of control/concession across society. Thus, the official ideologies concerning commodified women merge with notions of objectified men. Commodity creates a juncture that establishes close associations between dissolute men and women.

Similarly, Shakespeare has us notice that the stereotypical associations between the acting profession and whoredom that were embedded in the extended significations of commodity are equally complex. Such connections were admittedly both ideologically expedient and predictable concerning early modern theatre, which was a place where whores would be present, either as audience members or to ply their trade. As I have demonstrated, however, plays are ambivalent forms of early modern expression and theatre is the

representation as much of its socio-historical background as the story to be told: what starts out as commodity may end as art and vice-versa. Thus, it would be limiting to consider theatre and the acting profession as simply commodity. Likewise, female self-construction was sometimes focussed on women's appropriation of male agency. The creation of an increasingly unstable characterisation of commodity came with the female whore's invasion of the male area of the tavern and her negotiation of practices previously regarded as "mannish". The result was to consider anyone as capable of being whorish or to potentially embody the cash nexus qualities attributed to commodity. Shakespeare and his contemporaries often represent masculinity as an uncomfortable negotiation between patriarchal oppression and the subversion of male domination: whores did sell their services to satisfy their male clients' sexual needs and were often under the control of a pander but the latter was not necessarily a male pimp as the Bawd in *Pericles* or Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure* show. Significantly, female sex workers were considered at once to be social outcasts and the only women in early modern England acknowledged as having a profession. It is perhaps, therefore, the whore's ambiguous social status as both a figure of immoral desire and an embodiment of economic independence that allowed notions of commodity to evolve regardless of gender.

At the same time, the early modern individual family unit was headed by a publicly empowered Christian male and the assigned social role of women was to be submissive within the restrictive private sphere. Yet, although the late plays were written under James I, for much of Shakespeare's career the head of the national household was a woman and the focus of Queen Elizabeth's Protestant England was on increasingly liberalised external trade. Exchange included business with the "infidel" Ottoman market, especially after Elizabeth's excommunication by Pope Pius in February 1570, when a laissez-faire commodity exchange became the nation's condition of being (Jardine 374). If Elizabeth constructed her royal persona through the morally irreproachable "Virgin Queen", as we have seen, there was nothing wrong in perceiving free-thinking commercial practices as an intrinsic part of the nation. Women aware of such liberties, whether in officially condoned texts or artistically represented on the early modern page or stage, may thus have seen commodity as a means to achieve some agency or as an active political resistance. As Jean E. Howard remarks: "Citizens' wives who went to [the] theatre might, at one extreme, be invited by its fictions to take up positions of chastity, silence, and obedience, but at another extreme by its commercial practices they were positioned as consumers, critics, spectators, and spectacles" ("Crossdressing" 440). Oscillating between fact and fiction, commodity had thus already acquired ideological connotations that moved beyond any social conformity, whether in the sex market, the private household or the public

arena. Correspondingly, a displacement of conventions also had the effect of increased agency. Commodity, when used as a strategy to create an autonomous space for one's own needs and desires, enabled female characters to resist traditional notions of subordination.

By virtue of their reinvention as precious commodities and a metaphorical use of the tricks of the trade, Marina and Isabella, for example, escape the generic restrictions of whoredom and their relations with Lysimachus and Angelo are displaced and transformed. If both characters are ostensibly silenced by marriage, Shakespeare questions and deconstructs traditional power relationships by undermining male authority and enabling the female voice within boundaries ostensibly designed to restrict women's agency, such as brothels or prisons. Even when Boult lasciviously declares: "Performance shall follow" (19.49) after buying Marina from pirates to prostitute her, Shakespeare's equivocal treatment of her provides the necessary theatrical space through which to understand attitudes towards commodity in early modern society. The brothel actually reveals more about Prince Hal and Lysimachus than the men do about the brothel, since they bring their dissolute, hypocritical immoral life to it. The brothel, along with the weighted bowl in *King John*, are thus powerfully simple conceits that are of crucial significance to the confusion created in society due to commodity. If Ben Jonson, in his *Ode to Himself* (1629), referred to *Pericles* as a "mouldy tale" (Dobson and Wells 344) and Doll is arrested by callous watchmen and dies, the endings also deny official forms of domination because the prostitute is unjustly put in prison and the loquacious princess is silenced into marriage by an unscrupulous suitor.

Such plays hence call for a re-examination of gendered power relations in marriage. Moreover, the themes of commodity developed in Shakespeare's theatre meant that female space and place is given both a horizontal and vertical dimension. In *The Taming of The Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, close reading exposes the emerging cracks in medieval convention and shows the variety of representations of womanhood, revealing how women were able to transcend thresholds, either within or outside the bounds of the Elizabethan or Jacobean household or up or down the commodity hierarchy. Although Katherine does beseech the other women and place her hand under her husband's foot, we cannot know "whether Shakespeare means her to be ironic in these actions [since to] conform outwardly but not inwardly [was] a common trope in the period from religious conflicts" (Keinänen Personal communication). Perhaps the household in *The Taming of the Shrew* as the woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be seen, therefore, as examples of Foucault's heterotopias. If so, Shakespeare's stage provides space where male objectification of their wives is resisted from the inside; Shakespeare's shrew story can clearly be said to script and manage inside and

outside space for a “mixed, joint experience” (Foucault “Spaces” 3). Looking closely at Shakespeare’s representations of the chrematistics of marriage within household spaces has revealed that unequivocal interpretations are to be avoided, all the more so as women could be seen to play an important role at home and exert influence in society at large. As suggested by the status confusion inherent in Christopher Sly’s costume change, account needs to be taken of changing early modern household responsibilities and gender relations. What the playwright seems to assume is that roles in society are above all shared or even a chaotic male gamble on female submission that ultimately commodifies men; as Bianca says to her husband Lucentio at the end of the action: “The more fool you for laying on my duty” (5.2.13), with “lay” implying the constraint of “wager, stake [...] impost, tax” (ODEE 537). If it is true that early modern women were allowed a very limited number of legal rights so that their lawfully authorised status was restricted to that of a contained commodity, on stage they were accorded agency thanks to strategies that mediated between masculine ideologies and cultural reality. And indeed, Shakespeare’s spatial tactics sometimes contain male characters instead.

*Measure for Measure* is about such misapprehension of appearances: Angelo should perceive Vincentio’s retirement as a ruse to gain prestige, Claudio’s romantic interest with Juliet as true worth and Isabella’s embodiment as jewels as useless. The Duke should understand Isabella’s use of Angelo as a means to retain her own subjectivity. My focus on *Measure for Measure* is on how deceptive narratives of commodity are played out in a dystopic world, where no level of society (from supposedly social nexus ruler or religious representative, to the lowliest cash nexus prostitute or pimp) is entirely resistant to this way of thinking in terms of monetary value. On the other hand, men in subordinate positions are also depicted as resisting their abject status. Chapter Seven, for example, calls for a re-examination of traditional representations of power that simplistically encode the inferiority of the soldier. English imperialistic discourse was a cover for colonial expansion based on credit. Accordingly, Shakespeare’s depiction of Cade’s rebellion questions an Elizabethan society unable to provide for the Englishmen who fought against the Spanish Armada but, instead, marginalised soldiers by issuing edicts that forbade selling off their armour to provide for themselves. Furthermore, the performance of mercenary military heroes, such as Talbot, whom Shakespeare nonetheless represents as sacrificed for political purposes, helps to identify the cultural conflicts emerging throughout different historical eras and at all levels. Shakespeare’s soldier figures, especially Falstaff, signify a parallel emerging network of changing loyalties and betrayals, where every pretender to the throne tries to outmanoeuvre the others by claiming armed protection. State rhetoric can hence be destabilised by the fundamental gestures of insatiability and cowardice

that accompany the oratory. Instead of a sincere expression of altruistic concern for the commonwealth, the soldier as a symbol in Shakespeare reveals the condition's bleak reality as a frequent object of egotistical disrespect and derision along with the cynicism that is put into perspective and commented on, through comic distortion, by the common soldier.

I have also considered the generic perspective on "vulgar", meaning common, as one of the new abuses Shakespeare deals with when applied to kings. Shakespeare stages the new bias of the royalty by his personification of "commodity" as a bawd in *King John*. He alludes to kingly vulgarisation through the "crown", "glove" or thanks to numismatic references. Shakespeare shows how the king, by means of a fictitious overpricing of his own intrinsic value, becomes a "clipper", or a dishonour to true worth. Self-seeking commodity, crowns and cynicism are catalysts in Shakespeare to allude to the vulgarisation of kingship, in that it is debased to the status of an unrefined commodity whose authority can be usurped, purchased, pillaged, prostituted or resold at will. Moreover, the tangible presence of the crown as a prop on stage would have mediated further ocular proof as to the interchangeable nature of authority.

Furthermore, in *Henry V*, Henry's "victimisation" (Gurr 186) of Williams (he gives him a glove filled with crowns (*Henry V* 4.8.50)) belittles the victory of Henry's army at Agincourt. Andrew Gurr emphasises how Henry speaks of the "fellowship" of the army (4.3.39); he then speaks of the "fellow" of the glove (4.8.39), and then of Williams as a "fellow" (4.8.51), to distance the king from the commoner ("New Cambridge Shakespeare" 186). At the same time, Shakespeare uses "crowns" to better Henry at his own semantic game by signifying how monetary payment was a crucial stage towards awareness of new visions of society for both the soldier and the sovereign. The impact of the English victory is thus minimised through the reduction of the "crown" to a vulgar commodity and soldiers of all degrees to the status of mass-produced objects. The term "crown" thus even symbolises the objectified king and challenges any officially-held notions of royal superiority. By displacing the metonymic regalia from symbol of authority to means of commercial exchange, Shakespeare makes it difficult to distinguish king from object.

My examination of the early modern sense of "vulgar", along with the etymology and numismatic aspects of "crown" and its uses in Shakespeare, aims to provide a clearer understanding of how the playwright provides a vibrant image of the crown as a commodity, or broker, between king and common soldier. Shakespeare reveals Hal's capacity for crown reform and reissue to apparently enable the character, in *Henry V*, to pay back his father's debts and make his own profit. As the Prince has already remarked: "My reformation, glittering o'er my fault, / Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes / [...] Redeeming time when men



think least I will” (*1 Henry IV* 1.3.191-195). And yet, as Shakespeare elsewhere reminds us, in a play composed at the very same time as *1 Henry IV* and *King John*: “All that glisters is not gold” (*Merchant of Venice* 2.7.65) and Hal’s words may point to another understanding of the character as becoming enslaved to commodity and objectifying kingship. Such disruptions are manifest in Shakespeare’s theatrical attempts to construe the “emerging world of commodities” (Hawkes “Theory” 10) through symbol. The kings represented in Shakespeare show a close relationship to their subjects (Henry with Talbot or even Petruchio) because the mercantilism of the period is equated with mechanisms of influence that involve a complex mix of grandiloquent gallantry, gold and glory. Shakespeare’s kings are thus constructed in relation to the roles and functions of such commonplace signifiers. The emblem of the “crown” serves to embody state authority in its uncertain scheme of balancing the prerogatives of power and economic necessity.

This new mercantile system was centred upon a horizontal cash nexus system of relationships called upon to replace a vertical social hierarchy. People who possessed the ability to manipulate these new social codes also seemed to control the ability to wield power, even if in many instances the new authority was a smoke screen codified by statute and symbol to create the illusion of preserving the former notions of command. Parading status symbols also ostensibly maintained old order appearances and attempted to hold together national unity, through the creation of myths intended to trigger feelings of attachment, to maintain standing and contain subjects in past allegiances. However, emblematic signs such as the “crown” no longer enclosed and conferred the authority and honour of the legitimate monarch and must have already been understood as little more than mere theatrical tricks by many. Vital emblems, supposed to embody legitimate ruling rights, had lost their quintessence; the king or queen (like the actor playing them on a stage) could still parade their might, yet the symbol and the strength had become nothing more than a vulgar commodity potentially available to anyone.

Admittedly, there is no successful uprising of paupers to overthrow princes on Shakespeare’s stage. We have seen, nonetheless, how Shakespearean characters attempt to resist the dominant culture of commodity whatever their gender. As such, this thesis perhaps contributes to feminist scholarship by showing how traditional male/female gender binaries are too rigid, since in Shakespeare’s plays, for example, soldiers are comparable commodities to prostitutes and both are seen to adopt coping strategies (including derision or comic distortion) that help them negotiate the burgeoning capitalistic model, at least as long as they are able to.

In addition, I have demonstrated how the fine line between power and commodities is depicted as being permeable across the social scale, thus adding to academic knowledge of



Shakespeare's vision of order and the increasing uncertainty, anxiety and loss of agency for both men and women within the framework of the commodity system. As we have seen, society was already becoming disordered due to commodity demand during the early modern period.

The representation of commodity in Shakespeare's theatre may thus help us make sense of how mercantile models are still so ineffective at offering up an alternative value system. The world economic crisis that occurred ten years ago due to the securitisation of subprime loans into mortgage-backed commodities was proof of how the capitalist system had been pushed to its limits. It was a commodity scam on a global level that left six million people homeless whilst others profited from the situation thanks to swap commodities designed to make money from the former homeowners' credit default. Instead of prompting reform of the corrupt system, politicians used taxpayer money to bail out the banks. Furthermore, the representation of commodity in Shakespeare's theatre also already hints at the ecological disorderliness that we have amplified to the extent that the world's natural resources are not enough to ensure its annual commodity supply. Future ideas for research could hence perhaps include the natural dimensions that Shakespeare offers up as alternatives to commodity that I have not had enough space to enlarge upon here. Despite a global acknowledgement of the commodity paradigm's failure to offer a future that does not entail our ecological destruction, it is proving very difficult to escape its market logic. A recent example of this is the 2018 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel awarded to William Nordhaus and Paul Romer for their research aimed at purportedly combining growth and the well-being of the planet. Although their work has been seen as revolutionary, it essentially proposes commodity solutions to the ecological crisis. For instance, we can kill bees since we can always replace them with commodities (pollinating robots) and need not take into account the question of the limit of natural resources at all. The model can create growth through commodities but it denies the irreplaceable nature of common natural resources, an issue that Shakespeare was already shedding light on centuries ago. It is because of the influence of such theories that we are today in a disastrous situation in the fight against climate change and condemned to continue commodification instead of addressing increasingly pressing ecological issues.

Shakespeare clearly showed how commodity was totally overtaking the human sphere but also showcased how commodity should only be one dimension of it, alongside human and ecological considerations. Within the context of the current ecological crisis, the performance of commodity in Shakespeare's theatre reveals how commodity must submit to the logic of nature and be mindful of humanity. Shakespeare understood that commodity alone cannot be trusted to regulate society.

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